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## The Later Life of Theseus, King of Athens.

(From the Memoirs of Menestheus, the  
Erechthid.)

By MARY BUTTS.

WE were all without illusion that any good was to be expected from these affairs. From the first they appeared deplorable; now that the worst has happened, I can only repeat that it was expected, foreseen, foretold, and that, as so often occurs, now it is over, the situation is left very much as it was before.

Now that the late Government in Athens has changed, as it was bound to change, it can be seen that the activities of the late king were no more than the wind ruffling the unstirred halls of Ocean, where sit, if I may say so, those dumb and flexible powers who reigned before him, and have been shown to survive him. I mean that I, after these years of exile and observation, have come back into my place. Or, it would be more prudent and more cautious to say that a place has come back and been filled by me.

Theseus has gone. He was not legitimate—not one of those earth-sprung princes created to rule because in some sense they are this piece of land. He had no business in Athens

here at all, though he might have done well enough in Troezên. When he chose to come and lord it here, he should not have been surprised if, though the people applauded him, the air and the stones did not accept him; and that in time the people of this ancient situation were persuaded, not by him, but by the stones and the air.

Theseus went. During his reign I watched his efforts, I and others, and knew that all we had to do was wait and watch the spending of his energy, and even admire its furious turns. It passed. When it was over, I took my place and my turn. The land had sighed, turned over, and now sleeps again.

But what a time we had! New laws, new drains, new wives. I remember as if it were yesterday the day Phædra arrived in her Cretan ship. The daughter of Minos and of Pasiphaë. She seemed a staring, silly maid. A little sub-normal, I thought, a freak of over-breeding. She was very quiet in the palace, though I was rather pleased at the shrine she built to a featureless but peculiar Aphrodite.

There is nothing I deplore more than the effort made by men like Theseus to abstract and beautify the gods. At the same time to make them into men. I and my friends know that they are neither abstract, human, nor necessarily beautiful. So I welcomed the gesture of Theseus' wife, but, again, I may have idealised it. She was probably homesick for some Cretan daimon, a furtive, indoor, woman's goddess.

Well, the Cretan neurosis soon found its expression. As is usual in these affairs, it was the talk of the place before the actors or sufferers knew what was happening to them.

What no one foresaw was the appeal to Poseidon. Nor the immediate response in circumstances when a god such as Theseus conceived might well have counted seven. In half-an-hour the matter would have been explained. Artemis should have seen to that. Personally, I wish Poseidon had let Hippolytos be, promise or no promise. Only I know that the divine element must always work like that. It is an automatic quality, and the gods when they act are so much stored power released. In the same manner, Artemis did not come until Hippolytos' extremity compelled her. A racing goddess, but a woman?

But it is little use to speculate on what ought to have



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happened. Theseus, our late showman, gave us an exhibition that will not soon be forgotten. It was not the first. It proved not to be the last.

His energy in passing new laws in the first months of his widowhood is impossible to describe. It became difficult, before the feast of Anthesteria, to catch sprats, to draw water between sunset and midnight from the public fountains, and forbidden to invoke Poseidon on any account at all.

It became possible to marry one's aunt, and there were regulations as to the destruction of fish-heads in hot weather for which I think there is something to be said. At the same time, the war he made almost immediately on the Lapiths was evidence that his character was weakening.

We did not oppose it. There are worse things than a small war, fought in one's own place so as not to interfere with the harvest. I was not curious about the Lapiths; but when a community is ruled by a man like Theseus, kept in a constant state of excitement, with nothing to do but neglect its business to talk not even about his ideas but about him, I considered their arrival was reasonably well-timed. Personally, I believe he invited them; but I will describe, as I saw it, the result of the first and only battle in the campaign.

Indeed, it is well known how they met. Theseus and that old scoundrel Perithoös. How they craned over their chariots to observe each other, and Theseus countermanded the charge, and how they walked out between the lines and examined one another till Theseus kissed him. The city knows how they came back, arm in arm, both sides straggling behind them; and the noise they made opening up the palace for a foreign army to get at the wine. It had always been more of an inn than a gentleman's residence. The little queen Phædra had tried to introduce the Cretan formality. Theseus had played at that, but not for long. But there was no ceremony that night when they roared their songs and rang their cups, and lit cressets whose light danced on the marble in the wind and lit the palace right out to sea.

At dawn they went roaring down to the Piræus. I thought of the wonderful luck of the man, to whom the next event was always kind. There is a kind of compensation for the man who uses life, who gets into trouble and into pleasure

as a boat runs from tack to tack. He had better remember, though, that he is used, and not so honourably, as the man who submits to life's using of him. I might have been a Theseus.

But there they were that night, Theseus and Perithoös the heroes. He sent his Lapiths home, but he stayed; and they went riding together, went drinking, went talking, until the town began to say "The end of this will be a new queen."

It must be remembered that he was not a man to act upon design, and one who would as lightly offend the Dioscuri as he would have taken Heracles into his house when that hero had just murdered his own children. The fool never knew that blood will more than out, that blood will have blood. He has been praised for what he did then, for his friendship with a man so close to him in temperament that he could despise his madness and the pollution of blood; keeping him with him till his wits came back, and telling him that the sole evil of his act was his fear of it. I heard that said, and saw Heracles comforted at last. I smiled. I do not know what blood is, but it is not so easily got rid of as that. The earth wins at last. We shall go down to the house of Hades, and there will be no more of these swaggering Olympians and the heroes they have so jovially begot. And I mean to be on the side that must win, if it means a lifetime of quiet.

Besides, I saw Perithoös chewing a twig of buckthorn last March, for a purge, I suppose, not uneasiness, before they began the scandalous entertainment we witnessed when they stole the immortal sister of the Dioscuri, Helen-of-the-Egg, the daughter of Zeus and the Swan.

I do not doubt that people were right when they said that it was Perithoös' suggestion. He would have done anything for Theseus. Theseus must have put it to him in this way: I can hear him say: 'Those Cretan sisters were both a mistake. One to hang herself, the other to go off with a god. Hippolyta was too much the other way. We were too like each other. I was unfair to her, and I'm sorry for it now. I did not treat her as I would have been treated, and it is a shame to me. There are only Phædra's children left; I don't



like the breed. I must have another choice of heirs. But a pure Greek this time, Perithoös'.

Then Perithoös suggested, without an idea but to get his friend what he wanted: "Why not a goddess this time, Theseus?"

I suppose they discussed it a little, but I am sure that, after a hundred words, they were asking "Which one?" and when I consider their difficulties I do not wholly reject their choice.

Every far-seeing and observant man has had his eye on the nursery of Tyndareus. The girls were born to be queens in Hellas. Queens have come to no good lately in this city; but there was no harm in Theseus asking. Only, when he asked for her, he was refused on the count that she was a child.

The reason was not only sufficient, it was true. But Theseus and Perithoös left the city at once. A month later they came back, arm-in-arm, roaring, and told the town they had stolen her. To marry her? No. For ransom? Not at all. But to leave with his mother for three years till she should be old enough. Anyone could see that this would not do. What did he suppose her brothers would have to say about it? The Dioscuri were a notable pair of young men. Far better to have married her at once, child or no child; but that is the sort of thing Theseus did not do.

Immediately I retired to my country estate, where they would know when to find me.

Theseus made no excuses. I cannot suppose that he had any. He is reported to have said that the marriage would make for peace in Hellas, and one of the Fates would cut her throat when she heard about it; but that he could not touch a child. His position seemed contradictory. I suppose he was vain enough to want her conspicuous beauty, at his age, who had had Ariadne, Hippolyta and Phædra. I waited with impatience for her brothers, hoping to hear a piece of the divine mind, and watch a contest between an old hero and the young. I am not a hero. I and my house were before this fashion for law-givers and unfortunate husbands; and I shall be here when some funeral games, getting cheaper every year, are all that is left of them. I should not be surprised if it is I who will insist on some small decencies being preserved, and an offering of at least a minimum of honey and hair. All the

same, since ceremonies round holy graves are a part of public life, why not have the body in the grave practically anonymous, and the sacred snake? It is known what the sacred snake is there for. At the same time it is not known. Certainly I would have Theseus forgotten as Theseus.

I will now describe what happened. There was an attempt made to hide the girl. Theseus had brought her to his mother; but this was not generally known. I was looking for her myself in a strange place, when I came upon the brothers, Castor and Polydeuces, doing the same thing. I offered them my reflections, nothing more. They were too innocent to use and too proud to influence. One was a king's son and the other a son of Zeus, but my position was less equivocal than theirs. Not that they recognised it, blown as they were with these new splendours; but they were boys enough to be glad of any company, and to explain why they were found among the cliffs at Scyros in a cave.

Their objections to the marriage were obscure and mostly untrue. They said that Helen was too young; but Theseus had agreed with them. They said that Theseus was too old: which did not matter. They said his former marriages had been unfortunate: which is immaterial. Then they implied that Theseus had fore-knowledge, and was deliberately going against what was bound to happen: which is impossible. They showed no love for their sister, but an acceptance as though she were a part of nature. Not as men speak from pride of race. They took her away, I was told, in silence. Afterwards, Theseus and Perithoös were seen on the terrace, looking out to sea, together and also silent.

I did not pretend to understand. The life of the girl Helen has been worth attention. I felt that she was of the same stuff as myself, put to the uses of those new heroes. The uses to which she has put them we are beginning to learn. They have forgotten that there were potencies here before Zeus. But this affair began with the jovial theft of a pretty child and some inconsistent behaviour. It ended with the return of the child, and it was plain to see that Theseus did not think that he had lost any of his dignity. Knowing that he was soon likely to attempt an even more conspicuous adventure, I had a time of indecision when I questioned myself,



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not for the first time, as to what I had gained by the part in life that I had played.

Before the Argo's voyage and the hunt of the Calydonian Boar, life moved quietly in this land, arranged on certain antique forms. These I have upheld against the innovating heroes. There are dark spots in nature. Let them stay dark. Man need not try to illuminate them. His business with them is to keep harmony by due propitiatory sacrifice to the infernal powers. I would offend no sacred snake. Omit no libation of honey, milk or blood. Especially not blood. It is, when you think of it, the cheapest of the three.

That there are powers propitious to man I do not deny. That the unpropitious can be disregarded I hold to be the belief of an idiot child. Hard, pliant and astute man must be, observant of birds and the prohibitions of his folk.

That is what these men are not doing. In the place of nature they have put their own wills. The minotaur died; but the Cretan curse returned. I was sorry for Hippolytos, the son of a virago our hero king made a martyr of.

What has the Golden Fleece done for us? Gold will go back the way it came. I have seen this in the sky.

With three queens under the earth and one refused him, with heirs of a kind to succeed him, the ruler of a people who cheered him and twittered at him, in the late middle years of his life Theseus decided that he had not dared enough, and that the time had come for a yet more outrageous enterprise. He had lost the young Helen. Well and good. This time he would have a goddess.

It was said that Pallas Athene was his first choice. I wondered mildly what she would have thought of Phædra's small white palace after her Olympian house. Of course, I remembered that in earlier days her life had been simple, and she had exacted from us no more tendance than was customary when our lives were simple too. That was before these goddesses had gone up in the world, and become daft on heroes. Jealous, also, of each other. Artemis attended Hippolytos' death, and swore to Aphrodite that she would kill Adonis in revenge. That, I suppose, is going on somewhere. But would they allow themselves to be stolen? Anyhow, Theseus changed his mind. He and Perithoös went

away, side by side, in two small chariots; and no one knew where they were going. They did not return, and slowly the tale came round that two handsome men of middle age had been seen going down to the House of Death and Persephone. They went through the mountain. They came to the place. They crossed Acheron, Cocytos, Styx. I do not know how they managed Cerberus. To end it, they got inside.

They had come to steal Persephone.

They stole Persephone. I am telling you what happened. I do not know how they did it. Nor what they said to her. It is a long time since she lost her habit of reappearing among us with the spring. Also, there is something about the house of Hades that is agreeable to women. Most of the conspicuous ones there are men, but a woman sits on the throne of that house and distributes its poppies. It is all Persephone, and Eurydice that a man put back. Only it seems certain that she was willing to go. It is a terror to me to admit it, but certainly, since these events, the House of Hades has lost much of its prestige. I can no longer see it half-lit, smelling of dark flowers and blood. It has become one of other places. I wish I knew how they persuaded her. Unless he was lying, and Theseus did not lie, she said she would come and live with him in his Athenian house, and be a queen to this city. What did they offer her? What did she ask? It happened quickly, I imagine, but she came away between them.

Then Cerberus caught them at the door, and all I know is that Persephone herself was turned back, and Theseus stuck to a rock, and of Perithoös nothing was said.

It was then that opportunity found me, and I became king again in Athens, and did something to restore old ways and discourage conversation. I was in the full interest of my negative experiment when they came back, first Perithoös, then Theseus.

They seemed to take more pleasure in my society than they had done, and were good enough to say that they found me unchanged. I could not say that of them. They were older. They were fatigued. There is one thing certain about these heroes, that they wear themselves into their graves. And they do not wear well. However, I thought it becoming to give up the kingship at once.

We were back where we had started, nearly a lifetime



ago; and time was now our common enemy. If I had realised it then, I should have grieved to have given up that for which I had waited for so long. But it had always seemed to me that he was mortal, and I the immortal, for I come of the life that rises and flowers and passes down into the earth again. From uncountable ages my fathers were the earth-kings of this place, and for them the earth's luck held, and they were re-born in their sons for ever. Only I have no son. In me, for the last time in direct line, Athens has returned to her kings, seeds of the Erechthidæ, sprung-of-the-soil. So I conquered Theseus the hero, who did not understand these things.

I have striven to alter nothing.

It was not I who threw Theseus over the cliff. We were walking one day and talking, and I noticing how he was ageing, though proud and angry like a king-bull. The thought of bulls recalled my mind to Crete, and Crete to Minos—a square throne, tight-waisted women, pinched Phædra, a grinning, black Aphrodite-at-home, the north wind that came ruffling our sea, loud voices, men with gold hair.

Then, as I was thinking, his foot slipped, and he was over the cliff's edge; and if I trod on his hand as it clung, well, I was king again.

Only, to quiet all tumult in the city, I established his young children by Phædra at Scyros, and gave him the mound, the games, the libations and cut tresses for a hero, even to the sacred snake.

But it was I who put them there. Things may be equal between us. I leave that as I have left other things.

## Poems

By DOUGLAS GARMAN.

### Retrospect.

" Sweet friends, what shall become of Faustus,  
being in hell for ever ? "

Earth, the old earth, is wan with shreds of winter  
Torn by gusty winds from a silent sky,  
And caught, as straws in trees, by stark hills wounding  
Heaven with their hands, outstretched to azure fields  
Where the birds sing. Spring has been dead so long—  
Hyacinths fragrant in the window-pots  
And the white surf of snow ebbing from the meadows—  
And summer followed spring with cruel feet,  
Leaving a trampled corpse beneath the trees.

Are your arms empty, Paris ? And your cheeks  
Wrinkled ? The golden cups where Priam drank  
Are dusty shrouds for the white bones of Greeks,  
And the wine is spilt.  
Flutes all night sighed in the cedar-groves  
Beneath the moon, and the doomed palace hung  
A giant flower in the perfumed gardens,  
Swayed by the gusty light of torches held  
By home-sick slaves. Andromache's proud hands  
Twined laurel with yew for Hector's drunken brow,  
While Paris, the Trojan pierrot, woman-eyed,  
Smiled at the sleepy boy that poured his wine.  
Unheeded, through deserted corridors,  
Naked Cassandra crept, wailing her grief  
In answer to the owls : and when the flutes  
Were mute, dawn, like a pale consumptive, woke  
And coughed the blood-stained pellet of the sun.  
Then I, unwanted stranger at their tables,  
Fled from Helen's bed through the Grecian camp  
And put to sea.



## POEMS

O earth is sad !—yet man's impatient soul  
Clings to his body like the withered leaf  
That a mad wind flutters and spares and flutters  
On a dead branch. The eloquence of streams  
Is stunned with frost's bright hammer, and the ponds  
Hold in their gelid depths no secrets hid,  
But dreams of summer, golden-footed summer,  
And spring with silver feet. They too have forgotten  
Their youth and the life stirring in the mud ;  
They, too, feed on visions and forget  
That worms grow busy when the soul has fled.  
O the smoke of leaves piercing through the tree-tops !—  
It is more solemn than Death in a great city.

And she is always there.  
Why she ?—when that other reflected fair  
Image is brighter and  
More constant, though I cannot stretch my hand  
To touch her hair.  
Beyond the fires the wind in the pine-trees moaned  
Like Death's shroud rustling in an empty house,  
And the spilt flames were blood on the grey rock.  
There smiling Lillith wooed her youthful lovers  
With evil lips and secret perilous eyes,  
Which mirrors held in swift uncouth reflection  
The grave's most horrible shapes, and broken dreams,  
And moons adrift in a distracted sky.  
But in the tones of that too gentle voice  
Were Margaret's tears and rumour of her love—  
And I, Walpurgis-night's buffoon and fool,  
Turned from the spectre that smiled behind that face,  
For Death's fine scarlet thread was round her throat.

In the city, winding through the mist,  
Creep Death's unlovely crowds with noiseless feet :  
And none of them smile or look back at me,  
None of them weep.  
It is no slight thing to have escaped Death !

Where have the birds all flown ? What voices spoke  
Of langorous foliage and slow-winding rivers ?  
I, too, have dreams behind my eyes : but here  
Is only mud, and rain dripping from the house-eaves,  
And long brown valleys leaning to the sea.

When I have drawn the curtains and my lamp  
Is lit, I pay no attention to the rats  
Or the wind tearing at the window-joints,  
But I remember the ruins of old cities  
And the birds flying to the south—  
And I, Faustus, who have foretasted life  
In Trojan love-draughts and on Margaret's lips,  
Weep that those heedless ghosts should pass me by—  
It is no slight thing to have escaped Death !

*[This poem is the introduction to, and the following a part of, a longer poem.]*

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## The Lovers.

Over the way  
They beat that same insistent time,  
Whacking the ivories, stepping on the gas . . .  
O, she can play . . .

The ripple of the music fills a pause,  
Flowing in through the window, ruffling the calm  
Of conversation's twilit, cultured lake :  
But when the oil of supercilious smiles  
Has stilled those waters, unexpectedly  
The room is filled with the impatient ghosts  
Of dancers, and the shaded lights are swung  
In extravagant agitation, stirring the blood.

Yet, though my eyes are dulled with dreams, I smile  
And thank my hostess for a second cup ;  
Admiring the whiteness of an arm which bears  
African bangles and green Chinese jade—



Too placid ostentation of that wit,  
That gathers heterogeneous beauty fast  
On a single thread, and as adroitly moves  
Down smooth encyclopædic ways of thought,  
From Buddha's lap to Dante or the Film.  
Anthropomorphic Babel of worn souls,  
That, built with words, sways in the darkening room,  
Sways, but stands firm, buttressed with many tears  
Unshed.

But there is laughter over the way.  
A blonde girl leaning to her lover's arms  
Backward glances through dishevelled hair,  
Sighing love's tremulous sighs, commingled with  
Tears for uneasy days and treacherous nights.  
Her fingers falter as his fingers glide  
In feigned indifference to explore her throat—  
And she smiles, until too aptly curious he  
Stirs louder laughter in her sleepy veins,  
Whose throbbing warns her of submission and  
Ensuing sneers of a less credulous world.

Through the close-woven evening urban air  
The shrill cacophony of her pursuit  
Pierces. Then there is silence and I turn  
From that inscrutable shut door, that hides  
The strange enactment of a guessed-at love,  
To watch, fearfully, the other guests depart,  
Who leave me lonely, an unwilling lover.

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## Re-crossing the Bridge Alone.

The wistful music of departure floats  
In opalescent seas—  
A fugue of ghostly trees  
Responding to wan lights of lifeless boats,  
Shimmering mutely in a lustrous stream.

Where she has gone to does not matter much—  
The leafless branches dip  
Griefgentle hands to touch  
Reflexions—soon, of course, she'll come again,  
Shadowy footsteps echoing in a dream.

A tree, one taller than the others, lifts  
A beckoning fingertip ;  
But she has gone, a ship  
Without a wake, that like a sad cloud drifts  
Through opalescent seas and leaves no stain.

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### Antithesis.

Dark streets with bloodshot eyes  
Run to a river of fire—  
Strings of a passionate lyre,  
Where curious fingers wandering, in surprise  
Wake melodies to glut the soul's desire.

A sailor he, or monster from the sea  
With stars spilt from the necklace of the moon,  
Caught in his seaweed-tangled hair ; and she  
A dockside whore, or shrine of chastity  
Whose white flame gutters in life's dark lagoon.

With drunken hands he fumbles at her dress,  
Wrackclouded foam of separating waves  
That dims his sight : she bends to his caress  
Lips pale with sale of kisses ; mute with stress  
Of chanting requiems at lovers' graves.

Fearing his arms she draws the tattered blind—  
Black veil, with whitebranched coral damascened,  
Between the fact and seeming intervened—  
And smiles her hate, loathing the rough limbs twined,  
A sinuous shroud about a corpse demeaned.



Satiety by lust in crumpled sheets  
 She sleeps—pale priestess by illicit throes  
 Of passion shamed. Her hair's stream greedily flows  
 To lick death-pallid breasts, whose lipless teats  
 Burn like the fallen petals of a rose.

Dark streets with bloodshot eyes  
 Run to a river of fire—  
 Strings of a passionate lyre  
 Where curious fingers wandering, in surprise  
 Wake melodies to glut the soul's desire.

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## October.

Like an old woman, very tired, you smile  
 Sad month, and all the while  
 Minutes and weary leaves fall from Time's tree.

I shall not hear again the moan of ships,  
 At night mist-bound upon a moonless sea,  
 Nor feel the slow tide's lips  
 Lazily wandering to kiss my feet  
 At night.

No one moves in the street,  
 No one stirs in the woods, and by the sea  
 Only dead boats are waiting for the dawn.

Now mistresses forlorn  
 Mourn in deserted squares for lovers dead,  
 And tears are shed  
 By fountains buried under fallen leaves  
 For languid hours that will not come again.

The sun's pale leper in a grey bed grieves  
 In sullen anger at the world's dull pain—  
 And we cannot go out  
 Without galoshes and an overcoat  
 Because of the rain.

O mist of sadness stretching to the sea,  
And silences of sorrow in the street,  
And smoke of burning leaves !

There is no longer splendour at mid-day !  
But suns, like moons that wander out at noon—  
Pale whores awake too soon—  
Wearily sway  
To slow, embittered rhythms of disgust  
That low winds play  
On rusty strings of desiccated trees.

O golden, withered leaves, and empty seas,  
And wasted hours !

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### Introspective Filigree.

My soul is the white stone where water drips  
From old impassive fountains of the mind.  
There languid women stoop lascivious lips  
Smiling, and in the mute reflection find  
Bones of dead lovers.

A flute of constancy slips amber notes  
Between the folds of interwoven sighs :  
And in the limpid fountain-water floats  
Ophelia's ghost, staring up with sweet eyes  
At Hamlet her lover.

Unheeded patience of concentric waves  
Shiver their suave circumference at the brim.  
The mirror trembles ; and the white soul craves  
Strange limbless fishes with bright scales, and dim  
Retreats of still shadow.



Where moonlight silvers twisting shapes of girls  
 The sun has snored upon a golden bed.  
 Music of dripping water strings sleek pearls  
 With crashing splendour of emeralds on a thread  
 Of tremulous anguish.

Sleep rustles iridescent furious wings  
 In the white flame of glacial cascades—  
 Sad moth, whose dirge a sorrowing swan sings  
 Dying, while sound dies and radiance fades  
 Like dreams of young lovers.

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Sonnet.

If I were dead still Love would follow me  
 Into the grave, and quarrel for my flesh  
 With worms, peer in my lustreless eyes and see  
 Herself mirrored there, smile, and start afresh  
 To woo me. Love would lay her lips on mine  
 And find the stench of my decay still sweet,  
 My bones soft to her breast ; and she would twine  
 Gaily fairest flowers for my winding-sheet.

But Love dead, her ghost would unceasingly  
 Haunt the paths of my life and anger me :  
 So in this intermission between tombs  
 Where the soul, dazed with woken dreaming lingers,  
 Love's phoenix bird is dearer with her plumes  
 Of fire, than ashes drifting through my fingers.

# Beggars and Brigands.

By STELLA BENSON.

WE Europeans are always busy trying to reform established facts by quoting proverbs and the classics at them—like saying *Avaunt* to a ghost. “Honesty is the best policy,” we say, splashed as our honest waistcoats are with mud from the wheels of the Rolls Royces in which the successfully slick go by. “Beauty is only skin deep,” we teach the plain pig-tailed daughters of fathers who are away taking lovely ladies to Brighton. “You can’t keep a good man down,” we good men say to one another as we sell matches side by side in the gutter. “Kind hearts are more than coronets,” is our reply to dinner invitations we don’t get. The bottom is knocked out of most of our morality—and yet we pretend our morality still holds water. Ours is a shut-eye culture.

But the Chinese—whom we sometimes call “mystic”—are much more prosaic. In China nobody would pretend for a moment that honesty was the best policy—indeed it does not rank as a practical policy at all. In China there is no choice—no coy pretence of virtuous choice between two masters; those who serve Mammon become governor-generals, and those who don’t remain coolies. But only the half-witted would deliberately choose not to. It is no use telling a beggar or a brigand that honesty is the best policy if begging or the possession of a rifle has put three thousand dollars in the bank for him. Which of us would trouble to water the city streets with the sweat of our honest brows if, by tying a piece of raw meat round our calves to represent an open sore, we could earn a handsome fee at every door in our suburb?

Begging and brigandage pay so well in China that I often wonder why everyone does not embrace one profession or the other. Of course, they require different temperaments; the artist nature should devote itself to begging, and persons of a tougher fibre should tread the easy path of brigandage. Recruits to brigandage, I suppose, are limited by the fact

that there are not quite enough rifles to go round, though this difficulty will soon be removed by enterprising war-lords. And as for beggars—every time I see a beggar I realise that not everyone could bring that rich and dramatic art to perfection. To be a beggar you have to possess individuality and the rare power of arresting attention. The small town of Mengtsz can show four distinct styles in beggars. There is the large, insolent young beggar who carries on his back an unhappy old woman, theoretically, but not actually, his mother, and expects to be paid for this exhibition of filial devotion. There is the passive beggar who, with areas of raw meat skilfully half-displayed through exiguous rags, stands mutely shivering at doors until kind housewives fill his bowl. There is the blind—or theoretically blind—musician, hardly, perhaps, to be classed as a beggar. Sawing an interminable series of plaintive notes out of a one-stringed fiddle and dressed always in a neat blue robe, he walks briskly along, cocking his eyes at the sky, and is from time to time jerked out of the jaws of danger by a little attendant boy. And there is the beggar who sits on the ground with one of his legs hooked round the back of his neck, sobbing out a hysterical confusion of words and frightful hiccoughs of agony. The strange position of the leg is for some reason supposed to represent incurable paralysis. All these beggars, I am told by those who know, are wealthy capitalists and live in luxury. I saw a group of them coming out from a feast which some inane philanthropist had provided for them. They walked out upright, joking and rubbing their stomachs, but when they saw us they all collapsed in the street and began shuffling along on their sit-upons, using their arms as crutches—the usual beggar method of progress—and they all began practising the different varieties of their art for our benefit. Certainly, if you have the temperament for it, the vocation of beggary should be seriously considered. But it needs genius. Money earned in this way is not everybody's money.

No, I will be a brigand when I take out my Chinese naturalisation papers. I shall play Ma-Jongg in mountain caves, wear jade bangles and rich silk turbans, clatter through respectful villages on horseback to the stirring sound of gongs and rifle fire—and end up a war lord.



Even a quite ordinary brigand, a beginner, the equivalent, say, of an O.B.E., can afford to smile at governors and magistrates, who—even in China—are paid to pretend that honesty is the best policy. For instance, we are contemplating a trip to a cave some fifteen miles from here. The Chinese district superintendent will not let us go without an escort of eighty soldiers at fifty cents a day per man. But we are advised by a good authority that a tactful gift of a bottle of champagne or a roll of silk to the brigand chieftain who has his headquarters in the cave in question would be a safer protection than all the soldiers in Mengtsz. The chieftain, thus wooed, would, we are assured, entertain us hospitably in his cave. I daresay he would enroll us in his band. Or perhaps the premium for membership would be rather high. A second bottle of champagne—a cigar. We brigands are a kindly, easily-pleased lot, as long as you don't quote proverbs at us.

# The Reminiscences of Mme. F. M. Dostoevsky.

TRANSLATED FROM THE RUSSIAN BY S. S. KOTELIANSKY.

*These reminiscences are translated from the rough drafts of Mme. Dostoevsky's manuscripts which found their way to the Caucasus during the Civil War in Russia. The Archives of Georgia (Caucasus) managed to get hold of all Mme. Dostoevsky's manuscripts in August, 1922, and handed them over to the Moscow Central Archives.*

*The manuscript consists of over thirty separate notebooks of different sizes and served Mme. Dostoevsky as the basis for the final and polished text of her Reminiscences now kept in the Moscow Historical Museum.*

## THE EVE OF MY ACQUAINTANCE WITH F. M. DOSTOEVSKY.

ON the third of October, 1866, about seven o'clock in the evening, I arrived at the Sixth Grammar School (by the Tchernyshev Bridge) to attend Professor P. M. Olkhin's shorthand class. The lesson had not yet begun. I sat down in my usual seat, and had just started arranging my exercise books, when our professor came up, sat down on the bench near me, and said: "Would you like to undertake some shorthand work? I have been asked to find a shorthand writer, and it occurred to me that you might like to take on the work." I answered him that I was longing to find work, but doubted if I knew shorthand well enough to undertake any responsible work. Mr. Olkhin said that the work in question would not need greater speed than I possessed (100 words a minute), and that he was sure that I should be able to manage it satisfactorily. Then I asked who was to give me the work. "Dostoevsky, the author. He is now writing a new novel and wants to write it with the help of shorthand. Dostoevsky thinks that the novel will contain about seven folios of large

size, and he offers fifty roubles for the work." On my expressing my consent, Mr. Olkhin gave me a folded piece of paper on which was written Dostoevsky's address, and said to me : " I'll ask you to be at Dostoevsky's to-morrow at half-past eleven sharp, not earlier and not later. This is how he put it to me to-day. I am only afraid that you won't make friends with him : he is such a gloomy, stern man." I gave an involuntary smile, and said to Mr. Olkhin : " But why should we be friends ? I'll try to do my work as well as I can. Dostoevsky, the writer, I respect so much that I am even afraid of him, and this somewhat frightens me."

Mr. Olkhin looked at his watch, went to the chair and began his lecture. I must confess that this time his lecture was wasted on me. My thoughts were occupied with the conversation that had just taken place, and I was filled with happy thoughts. My cherished dream was to be realised : I had got work. If Olkhin, so strict and exacting, found that I knew shorthand, and wrote quickly enough then it must, indeed, be so ; otherwise he would not offer me the work. Olkhin's recognition of the progress I had made delighted me and raised me in my own eyes. I think that to everyone the first independent work in any branch whatever must have a great, perhaps even an exaggerated importance. Of such importance was to me, too, my first work. I felt as if I were advancing along a new road, that I could earn money with my own labour, that I was becoming quite independent ; and the idea of independence to me, a girl of the sixties, was the dearest of all. But still more pleasant and important than the work itself was the chance of working with Dostoevsky, of getting to know the writer personally. Indeed, he was my father's favourite author, and the name of Dostoevsky had been familiar to me from my childhood. I myself was enraptured by his works and had cried over *Memoirs from the Dead House*. And, all at once, the happiness, the luck—not only of making the acquaintance of the famous novelist, but of actually helping him with his work ! My agitation was intense, I wished to share my joy with someone. I could not help telling it all to my colleague, Alexandra Ivanovna I., who had just come into the class room. She was much older than myself, quite clever, extraordinarily bold, sharp-tongued and very capable,



but she often missed her lessons. Hearing of the work offered to me, she was a bit shocked that Olkhin had offered it to me and not to her, for she considered herself the best pupil. She congratulated me on the commencement of my shorthand career, and began asking me questions ; but I did not answer them, for I knew that Olkhin did not like the students to talk during the lessons. But when the lesson was over, Mlle. I. had her curiosity satisfied. . . . I walked with her as far as her house, and then took the coach, and in half-an-hour's time I was at home. I told my mother all the particulars, and she, too, was very glad : we talked for a long time of my luck. From joy and excitement I scarcely slept the whole night, picturing Dostoevsky to myself. Considering him a contemporary of my father, I imagined him as a quite elderly man ; now I imagined him as a stout and bald-headed old man ; now as tall and awfully thin, but always stern and gloomy, as Olkhin had described him. Above all I was agitated as to what I should say to him. He seemed to me so learned, so wise, that I trembled beforehand for every word I might say. I was also upset by the idea that I did not clearly remember the Christian names and surnames of his characters, and I felt sure that he was bound to talk of them. Never having met authors in my circle I imagined them as different beings, who had to be spoken to in quite a special way. Recalling to my mind those days, I see what a child I was then, in spite of my "respectable" twenty years.

#### MY FIRST MEETING WITH F. M. DOSTOEVSKY.

On October 4, the momentous day of my first meeting with my future husband, I awoke cheerfully, happy and excited by the idea that to-day my long cherished dream was to be realised : from a school girl and undergraduate I was to become an independent worker in the field chosen by myself.

I left the house a little earlier so as to call at the Gostiny Dvor to get a fresh supply of pencils and to buy a little portfolio, which, in my opinion, would give my youthful appearance a more businesslike look. By 11 o'clock I completed my purchases, and in order to get to Dostoevsky's at the appointed

## THE CALENDAR

time, "neither earlier nor later,"\* I walked with slow steps along the Bolshaya Meschanskaya and Stoliarny Perculok, continuously consulting my watch. At twenty-five past eleven I came up to the house, and asked the concierge, who stood at the gate, where flat No. 13 was. He pointed to the right, where, by the very gates, was an entrance to a staircase. The house was a large one, with a great number of small flats, inhabited by small shopkeepers and artisans. It at once reminded me of the house in *Crime and Punishment* in which Raskolnikov, the hero of the novel, lived. Flat No. 13 was on the third floor, reached by an ugly staircase, from which at that moment were coming down two or three men of a rather suspicious appearance. I rang the bell, and immediately the door was opened by a middle-aged woman, with a green, checkered shawl thrown over her shoulders. I had read *Crime and Punishment* recently and well remembered the Marmeladovs' checkered "family" shawl, so that the identical shawl of Dostoevsky's servant involuntarily struck my eyes. To her question whom I wanted to see, I said that I came from Mr. Olkhin and that her master knew that I was coming.

I had not yet had time to undo my scarf when the door into the hall opened wide, and in the background of a bright sun-lit room there appeared a young man, quite dark, with dishevelled hair, with an open chest and in slippers. On seeing an unfamiliar face he cried out, and instantly disappeared behind a side door. The woman asked me into a room, which was the dining-room. It was quite modestly furnished; near the walls stood two large trunks covered with carpets. A chest of drawers stood by the window and was covered with a white, knitted cloth. Along the wall stood a sofa and over it a clock. I felt great relief when at that moment I saw the clock showing half-past eleven. The woman asked me to take a seat, saying that her master would come in presently. Indeed, in a couple of minutes Dostoevsky appeared and asked me to come into his study on the right, and himself went out, as it turned out later, to order tea.

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\* This was Dostoevsky's usual expression. In order not to lose time in waiting for someone he would fix the exact time, always adding "neither earlier, nor later."—A.G.D.

Dostoevsky's study was a large room with two windows, which was very bright that day, but at other times it produced a gloomy impression: it was rather dark and still; one felt oppressed by that strange stillness. In a far corner of the room stood a couch, covered with a brown cloth, rather worn, and in front of it was a round table covered with a red cloth; on the table stood a lamp and a couple of albums, and round it were easy chairs and stools. Over the couch in a walnut frame hung a portrait of a very thin lady, in a black dress and a black bonnet. "This is probably his wife," I thought, as I did not know anything about his family life. Between the windows was a large mirror in a black walnut frame. As the space between the windows was much wider than the mirror, the latter was nearer to the right window, which was unsymmetrical and ugly. Two large Chinese vases of a beautiful shape stood on the window sills. Along the wall was a large divan of green morocco leather and near it a little table with a jug of water. Against the back wall, across the room, stood a writing table, at which I always sat afterwards when Dostoevsky dictated to me. The furniture was most ordinary, similar to what I had seen in the houses of not too prosperous people. I sat and listened, thinking that I should presently hear the voices of children, or the noise of a child's drum, or that the door would open and there would come into the study the unusually thin lady whose portrait I had just recently been examining.

Mr. Dostoevsky came in. To start a conversation he asked me how long I had been working at shorthand. I replied that I had been learning it for the last six months. "Has your teacher, Olkhin, many pupils?" he asked. "At first there came over one hundred and fifty applicants, but there remain now only about twenty-five." "But why so few?" he asked. "Many of them thought that it was quite easy to learn shorthand, but when they saw that it could not be done in a few weeks they gave it up," I said. "With us," he said, "it is always like that in every new thing: many start ardently, but cool down quickly and give it up. They see that application is needed, and who wants to work now?"

Dostoevsky seemed strange to me.

At the first glance he looks rather old, but presently one



can see that he is not more than thirty-seven. He is of middle height, erect. His face is worn, sickly. Bright brown, even slightly reddish hair, well greased and strangely smoothed. His eyes fail to match.\* One is an ordinary brown eye, the pupil of the other is very much dilated, and the iris cannot be seen. This dissimilarity gives his face a mysterious expression. Dostoevsky's face appeared very familiar to me, probably because I had seen his portraits before. Dostoevsky was dressed in a rather old, blue jacket, but his shirt was snow-white. To tell the truth, at first sight I did not at all like Dostoevsky.

Five minutes after my arrival the woman came in and brought two glasses of very strong, almost black tea. On the tray were two rolls. I took a glass, and although I did not want tea, and even felt hot, I began drinking it so as not to make a fuss. I was sitting by the wall at the little table near the writing desk; and Dostoevsky was now sitting at his table, now pacing the room, smoking all the time, frequently putting down his cigarette and starting a fresh one. He offered me a cigarette. I refused it. "Perhaps you refuse out of politeness?" he asked me. I said that I did not smoke, and did not like to see women smoking. A conversation by fits and starts began, and Dostoevsky kept on turning from one subject to another. The longer it went on the stranger Dostoevsky seemed to me: crushed, exhausted, ill. It also appeared strange to me that almost at once he declared that he was ill, that he had epilepsy. Of the work to be done Dostoevsky spoke vaguely. "We shall see how to do it; we shall try; we shall see if we can manage it." It seemed to me that our working together would hardly come off. It even occurred to me that Dostoevsky doubted the possibility and convenience of that way of working, and was perhaps going to give it up. To help him out I said: "Well, let us try; but if you find it inconvenient, tell me frankly then. Rest assured I shall not regard it as a grievance if our work does not come off." Dostoevsky asked my name. I told him; but he forgot it immediately, and asked me again.

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\* During one of his epileptic fits he fell down and stumbled on a sharp object, and so injured his right eye. Professor Yunge who treated him prescribed atropine, owing to which the pupil of his eye was dilated.—A.G.D.

The time was passing in conversation. Finally, Dostoevsky dictated to me from the *Russky Vestnik* and asked me to copy my shorthand into ordinary writing. He began dictating very rapidly, but I stopped him, and asked him to dictate with the speed of ordinary conversational speech. Then I began translating my shorthand into ordinary writing, and I did it rather quickly ; but Dostoevsky hurried me all the while and was surprised that I copied out so slowly. I observed to him that as I should be making the copy at home, not here, it ought not to matter to him how long the work took me. Looking through my copy Dostoevsky found that I had omitted a full stop and the hard sign in one word, and he remarked on it sharply. Altogether he was strange : either somewhat rude, or evidently too frank and outspoken. He was evidently too irritable and could not collect his thoughts. Several times he would ask me something, and then he would pace the room, pace it for quite a long time as though forgetting my presence ; and I sat without stirring, afraid to disturb his train of thought. At last Dostoevsky said that he could not possibly dictate to me then, but if I could come to him that evening at eight o'clock he would then start on his novel. Although it was very inconvenient for me to come the second time, I promised to come, as I did not wish to put off the work. When I was leaving Dostoevsky said : " You know I was rather glad when Olkhin proposed sending me a girl shorthand writer, and not a man. You are probably surprised, perhaps it seems strange to you ; you may ask why." " Why, then ? " I asked. " For this reason, that a man is sure to have a drinking bout, and you, I hope, will not." The idea of me " having a drinking bout " seemed to me so funny that I burst out laughing, and said : " Most certainly I shall not, you may be sure."

When I left Dostoevsky I was in a very depressed mood. I did not take to him, and he left a painful impression on me ; it also seemed to me that we should not be able to work together and that my ideas of independence would come to nothing. This was the more painful to me because last night my mother and myself were so delighted at the starting of my new career. It was about two o'clock when I left Dostoevsky. It was too far away to go home, and I decided to call on my relations, the Snitkins, who lived in the Fonarny Pereulok, to have

dinner there, and to return to Dostoevsky in the evening. Besides, as I was young, I wanted to boast to my relations that I was already beginning "to earn a living." More than once they let drop a hint that "it was easy for me with my mother behind me, that it was time I did something." But when I began learning shorthand they made fun of my "art," and said that I was only wasting my time. My relations were intrigued by my new acquaintance, and began asking me about Dostoevsky. The time passed quickly by, and by eight o'clock I was at Alonkin House. It was very unpleasant for me to enter that house : there were so many people there in the street and near the gate, and all of them such common people. The door was opened by Fedosya (she was quite pleased when, leaving in the afternoon, I gave her 20 copecks), and she went to announce me to Dostoevsky. I waited a few minutes in the dining-room, then entered the study and, after exchanging greetings with Dostoevsky, I took the same seat as in the morning, at the little table by the wall. Dostoevsky proposed that I should sit at his table, assuring me that it would be more convenient for me to work there. I must say that I felt highly flattered by his suggestion that I should sit at the table at which had been written such talented work as his recent novel *Crime and Punishment*. We changed seats, and began talking. Dostoevsky asked me again my name, and my father's name, and inquired if I was a relation of the gifted young writer Snitkin who had died recently. Dostoevsky made further inquiries about my family, of whom it consisted, where I had studied, what had made me learn shorthand, etc., etc., and why had my studies been so successful. In answer to his questions I had to tell him many particulars of which I shall speak later on in my story.

I told Dostoevsky that my father was a civil servant who had died in the spring. My mother was alive ; my sister was married to G. Svatkovsky, the censor, and my brother studied at the Petrovsky Agricultural College. I had finished my studies at the Grammar School with honours, and had been awarded a large silver medal. Then I had entered the Teachers' Classes, only just founded by Prince Peter Oldenburgsky. There I had no luck ; I took up natural science, but my heart was with literature, and during the hours when



according to the professor I had to make chemical experiments in crystallising salts, I was so much absorbed in reading my favourite authors (and above all, by the novels of Dostoevsky, which fact, of course, I did not mention to him) that all my tubes and retorts, left unattended, burst, and I myself became the laughing stock of my sweet colleagues. And when at the lecture of Professor Brandt I saw the dissection of a dead cat, I felt sick with disgust, and decided that a scientific career did not suit me. I left the classes for good.

To Dostoevsky's question what made me take up shorthand, I answered that my family was well-off, and that there was no need for me to earn my living. But, like most of the younger generation, I set a great value on complete independence, which could only be achieved by those who have work to do which compels them to rely on their own efforts. Dostoevsky said, seeing that Olkhin had selected me from all his pupils, I must possess brilliant ability if I was the only one quite prepared for that work. I said it was not a question of brilliant ability, that my success in shorthand was due to a special reason. Dostoevsky wished to know what that reason was, and I had to tell him. The courses commenced in the beginning of April, 1866. I immediately started on them, but after five lessons I was in complete despair: shorthand appeared to me a regular abracadabra, which I could not grasp, so obscure and unintelligible it seemed. I wanted to leave the classes, but my father, whose days were numbered, persuaded me to give up the idea. He assured me that if I worked hard I should overcome the difficulties. And his words indeed came true.

On April 28, 1866, my father died, and I was terribly upset by his death. It was the first real sorrow of my life! I was distressed, I cried, and could find no peace. My mother, to distract my thoughts from this great calamity, advised me to work, to stick to my shorthand. I wanted so much to justify my father's belief in my abilities, so I made up my mind to work hard and to achieve my purpose of becoming an efficient shorthand writer. The kind Olkhin came then to my assistance. Learning of my desire to work hard at shorthand, he suggested, for the sake of practice, that I should copy pages of a certain book in shorthand and send him my exercises by

post. He corrected them, sent them back to me ; I learnt by my mistakes, and, of course, avoided making similar ones in my further work. The shorthand correspondence with Olkhin made it possible for me to make progress in the practice of shorthand, and a daily two hours dictation helped me to achieve a speed of 100 words a minute. When in the beginning of September Olkhin's lectures commenced, it was found that the great majority of the pupils, over three-fourths, had given up shorthand altogether ; the rest did almost no work during the summer months ; so that it turned out that I was the only one quite prepared for independent work.

To all questions put by Dostoevsky I answered simply and seriously. On the whole, I behaved seriously, almost sternly, as Dostoevsky told me later on. I had made up my mind beforehand that if I had to work for private people I would establish my relations to them on a serious footing, avoiding any familiarity, so as no one should dare to address to me an unnecessary word, or to make a joke. It seemed to me that such behaviour on my part would be the best : for surely my object was to work, and not to make acquaintances ; why then take part in trifling conversations ? It would be much more becoming to behave strictly. Dostoevsky told me later on that he had been pleasantly struck by me : I was so young and yet behaved so well. No one who talked to me would think of using an unnecessary word—such an effect would my reserved manner produce. I believe I did not laugh once as I talked to Dostoevsky. He told me afterwards that my capacity for establishing my relations with people on a cold, respectful footing had pleased him very much. He had been used to meeting many nihilist women and to seeing their behaviour, and had expected the girl recommended to him to be like them ; therefore he was pleased to find in me the complete opposite of the prevalent type of young girls of that time.

During our conversation Fedosya prepared the tea in the dining-room and brought us two glasses and two rolls ; also a lemon. Dostoevsky asked me again if I wanted to smoke. Then he went to the window and took two pears from a paper bag and gave me one. Being used at home to good manners, such lack of ceremony on the part of a man who scarcely knew

me appeared somewhat strange to me. But Dostoevsky offered the pear so good-naturedly that the lack of ceremony pleased me ; I took the pear and ate it then and there with my young teeth, which needed no artificial appliances.

We went on talking, and, owing to his sincere and good-natured tone, it suddenly seemed to me that I had known him for such a long time, and I felt at ease and happy.

For some reason our conversation turned on the Petrashevsky revolutionary group and on capital punishment, and Dostoevsky told me that when he was standing on the Semionov Drill Ground among the others sentenced to death he knew, by the preparations which were going on, that he had only five minutes left to live. But it seemed to him that his life would last not five minutes, but five years, five centuries. White death shirts were put on them. The group was divided into batches, three men in a batch. Dostoevsky was in the second batch. The first three men had already been conducted to the pillar and tied to it. In a minute they would be shot, and then would come his turn. Oh, Lord, how much he wanted to live ! How sweet life seemed to him—what a lot of good he could do ! He remembered then his whole past life, the not at all good use he had made of it, and he wished so strongly to try again, and so strongly did he wish to live, to live long, long. But suddenly the retreat was sounded, and he felt cheered up. The first three were untied from the pillar and led back ; and a new sentence was read. Dostoevsky was sentenced to four years' hard labour in the Omsk Fortress. He was happier that day than he had ever been before. He paced his cell all day long (in the Alexeyev Ravelin of the Peter and Paul Fortress), singing all the time, singing loudly, so happy was he at the life given back to him. Then his brother was admitted to see him before his deportation, and on Christmas Eve he was despatched into that remote region. Dostoevsky told me that he had in his possession the letter\* written by him to his brother Michael on the day the sentence was pronounced ; that he had recently recovered it from his cousin. Dostoevsky told me a great many things that evening,

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\* The letter here referred to has been published in the book "Dostoevsky : Letters and Reminiscences." (Chatto & Windus.) Translated by S. S. Koteliansky and J. M. Murry.

and I was extremely struck by the fact that he was so deeply and sincerely frank with me, a young girl whom he had seen to-day for the first time in his life, and whom he did not know at all. He seemed so reserved and stern, and yet he was telling me so much and giving me so many details, all so frankly and sincerely, that I could not help being surprised. Only later on, when I got to know him, as well as his family relations, more closely, I understood the reason of his frankness and confidence. Dostoevsky was at that time spiritually lonely and he felt too acutely the need of sharing his thoughts and feelings perhaps even with perfect strangers so long as they were not hostile to him, and so long as he could discover in them a sincere and attentive attitude towards him. As for myself, his frankness and confidence pleased me very much, and left a wonderful impression on me.

I was a bit uneasy and annoyed that he did not begin dictating to me. It was getting late, and I had to go home. I had not seen my mother since early morning. I had promised her to come home after my morning interview with Dostoevsky, and now I was afraid that she might worry. I had no wish to spend the night at the Snitkins house. It would have been awkward to tell this to Dostoevsky, but, to my great pleasure, he himself said he was going to begin dictating. He started pacing the room with long strides, from the fireplace to the door, and every time he reached the fireplace he invariably knocked twice on it. He was smoking cigarettes all the while, taking a fresh one and throwing the unfinished one in the ash tray on the desk. After he had dictated to me for some time he asked me to read to him what I had written, and at the very first sentences he stopped me. "From Roulettenburg? Did I say Roulettenburg?" he asked. "You dictated that name," I answered. "Impossible!" "But is there a city of that name in your novel?" I asked. "The action takes place in a city where there is a casino, which I must have called Roulettenburg," he replied. "If there is such a place you must have dictated its name, otherwise how could I have known it? This geographical term is perfectly new to me," I said. "You are quite right," Dostoevsky admitted. "I must have muddled things up." I must say I was a bit put out, thinking that I had made some



mistake. But I was glad that the misunderstanding was cleared up. Dostoevsky was evidently absorbed in thought and troubled, or perhaps he was too tired.

Then Dostoevsky said that he could not dictate any more, and asked me to copy out what I had got down in shorthand, and to bring it with me to-morrow at twelve. I promised to do so without fail. It struck eleven, and I said that I must go home. Dostoevsky asked me where I lived. Learning that I lived in the Peski suburb, he said that he had never in his life been in that district, and did not know where it was. But if it was far he would send his servant with me. As it was far away and D. insisted that the woman should see me home, I had to say that I was going to spend the night with some relations who lived quite close to him. Dostoevsky saw me to the hall, and called the servant to light me down the stairs. As Fedosya and I were going downstairs I asked her what was her master's patronymic. I knew, from his novels, that his Christian name was Fiodor, but I did not know his father's name.

In the Stoliarny Lane it was quite noisy : drunken people were coming out from the public-house ; and I felt alarmed. Happily I soon came across a cabman and he agreed to take me home for 40 copecks. I urged him to drive quickly, and as he turned out to be a good-natured old fellow we began talking, just to kill the time, and he told me all about his village. At last I reached home. I had to wait a long time till the concierge woke my people. My mother had thought that I was going to spend the night at the Snitkins', and she had told the servant to bolt the door and to go to bed. I gave mother a full account of my day, and told her with rapture of how Dostoevsky was frank and nice. But not to grieve mother I did not tell her of the painful impression I have taken away with me—an impression more unpleasant than any I had hitherto experienced—and this despite the interesting way in which the day had passed. And the impression was indeed painful : for the first time in my life I had seen a man unhappy, deserted and badly treated ; and a feeling of deep compassion and sympathy was born in my heart.

*(To be continued).*

## Scrutinies

### (4) Arnold Bennett.

By EDWIN MUIR.

THE three representative novelists of the age which ceased so suddenly and so completely with the beginning of the War were undoubtedly Mr. Wells, Mr. Galsworthy, and Mr. Bennett. Twelve years ago Mr. Bennett would have been generally considered the least conspicuous of the three ; to-day he is, on the whole, the most conspicuous. In a world alien to his way of thought he is respected ; and our respect for him is, perhaps, chiefly a tribute to his personality. For he has immense vitality ; he is never daunted ; he gives always, and takes delight in giving, a sense of capability. These are qualities which equally in a confident and optimistic era such as that which preceded the War, and in a doubting and pessimistic one such as we live in now, would be bound to be welcomed. They increase our sense of power if we feel strong, and temper our sense of impotence if we feel weak. They are biologically useful ; they inspire confidence. The question whether Mr. Bennett's vitality is the artist's vitality, his courage the artist's courage, and his competence the artist's competence, has been generally overlooked in the satisfaction which his positive qualities, artistic or not, have given us. Yet it is an important question. The competence of the practical man to deal with the section of life which his will encounters is something quite different from the competence of the artist to deal with experience imaginatively. To the man of action this practical competence is so real that its reality is nearly unconditional ; it is the ground, conscious and unconscious, of his actions ; it is axiomatic. To the artist, on the other hand, it is largely an illusion ; he sees that it is based on negative as well as on positive qualities ; that, for example, it implies a limitation of vision, useful biologically, but injurious to the artist ; that it starts with all the utilitarian

illusions from which art alone, now that religion is in a state of suspended animation, can give us freedom. A book written by a man of practical capacity, if that capacity extends to the art of writing, will be always interesting. But its virtues will be the virtues of a practical personality, not those of art. Whether Mr. Bennett's novels belong to this category is the main critical question that can be asked concerning them. Provisionally let us hazard the judgment that he is a practical man who has chosen to express himself through the art of the novel; that he is an imaginative writer whose imagination is limited to such intuitions as can come to one who is determined to master the machinery of life rather than to see.

Take, for instance, Mr. Bennett's indomitable sense of his capability. It is disquieting that this is hardly to be paralleled in literature. Balzac, it is true, had some of it, but we recognise it in Balzac not as a virtue, but rather as a defect of his qualities, as his chief illusion about himself, the touch of vanity which falsifies his work. Now in Mr. Bennett this invariable competence to deal with all sorts of situations and all classes of experience on an excessive note of confidence is not a defect of his qualities; it is his characteristic quality. And we become conscious that this competence is simply the *savoir faire* of the practical man who *must* master the situation, and to do so must see no more in the situation than he can master, rather than the courage of the artist, who must see the situation in itself, whether it can be practically mastered or not. How clear and definite Mr. Bennett is when he is describing states of mind which his characters as successful people will remember later with profit; and how vague and incompetent when he writes about states of mind which will be of no conceivable utilitarian value to them! As Hilda Lessways led Sarah Gailey home from the scene of the attempted suicide,

"She was not extremely surprised. But she was shocked into a most solemn awe as she pressed the arm of the poor tragic woman who, but for an accident, might have plunged off the end of the groin into water deep enough for drowning. She did really feel humble before this creature who had deliberately invited death; she in no way criticised her; she did not even presume to condescend towards the hasty clumsiness of Sarah Gailey's scheme to die. She was over-

whelmed by the woman's utterly unconscious impressiveness, which exceeded that of a criminal reprieved on the scaffold, for the woman had dared an experience that only the fierce and sublime courage of desperation can affront. She had a feeling that she ought to apologise profoundly to Sarah Gailey for all that Sarah must have suffered."

This is admirable ; it describes the reaction of a practical young woman to an experience she has never encountered before. We see her cataloguing her sensations ; she will learn from them ; they will make her in some way more competent. But then follows her imaginative reaction :

"And as she heard the ceaseless, cruel play of the water amid the dark jungle of ironwork under the pier, and the soft creeping of the foam-curves behind, and the vague stirrings of the night-wind round about—these phenomena combined mysteriously with the immensity of the dome above and with the baffling strangeness of the town, and with the grandeur of the beaten woman by her side ; and communicated to Hilda a thrill that was divine in its unexampled poignancy."

The transition is astonishing. The situation passes from the intensely practical, where Mr. Bennett's mastery is complete, into the intensely human ; and at once his mastery falls from him ; he takes refuge in the vaguest of rhetoric. The moment which Hilda will remember all her life, when the sea, the sky, the city before her and the woman by her side, are changed, and become part of one universal experience—this moment Mr. Bennett cannot describe ; he can only make us feel that he is impressed by it, a little theatrically. He is vague here, as every practical man is when he is faced by something on which his will cannot operate.

The predominance of the practical in Mr. Bennett's novels is shown still more strikingly in their descriptive passages. There have been few writers who have described so fully as he, and yet have avoided describing visually. Conrad, perhaps an equal slave to description, used all his powers to make the scene visual ; Mr. Bennett uses his to tell us all about it. Conrad does sometimes make us see what he wishes us to see ; Mr. Bennett, at his best, describes something which, if we happened to see it, we should recognise. His directions are like those of a man in the street who tells us how many turns



we must take to reach a certain place, and by what signs we may recognise a shop there which we wish to find. We should have to pass through a street under repair, and then he would proceed to say that the gas main had burst a week before, and dozens of windows had been smashed. But after passing the street we should come to a square, and he would say that one side of this square was blocked, and why, and soon we should be well into the middle of a history of the square. Nevertheless, we must ignore the square and turn to the left into a short narrow street, and the shop would be the fifth on our right ; there would be three stone steps leading down into it. All these things, because they had a bearing on practice, would interest our guide, and finally we should find the shop. And in Mr. Bennett's novels we always find the shop ; but we do not go into it to see it, but always for a different purpose, and the consequence is that we never see it, we only know what is in it. We begin to have a sense, perhaps, that here a whole drama of buying and selling, of tear and wear, of credit and cash, is being worked out, and as practical men we are thrilled. We feel at last that if we chose we could run the shop ; for the practical man likes to think there is nothing he cannot manage, and that is the secret of his curiosity about all practical undertakings, even when they are outside his scope.

Thus in Mr. Bennett's novels we are always brought back to the illusions of the practical man. The mass of machinery which keeps urban civilisation going, the means of transport, of profit, and of pleasure ; our chairs, our fireplaces, our baths ; the beds we sleep in and the bells we ring ; all these are of supreme interest to the practical man, because to him they are not merely pieces of dead convenience, but instruments upon which he impresses his power. They are of supreme interest, too, to Mr. Bennett. They are not merely the environment amid which his characters live ; they are the *media* through which his characters express themselves. They bring people together ; they become integral parts of friendship and of love. In this benevolent working of the mysteries of machinery Mr. Bennett finds a certain romance which to the less practically-minded will for ever seem a little naïve. A mechanical part of our environment, a telephone or a tramcar, heralds a love affair, or becomes part of one. Is it not marvellous ?

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Mr. Bennett seems always to be saying ; but we are never quite sure that it is marvellous. Hilda Lessways is about to meet Edwin Clayhanger after a long absence.

"When she was going down the stairs, she discovered that she held the *Signal* in her hand. She had no recollection of picking it up, and there was no object in taking it to the breakfast room ! She thought : 'What a state I must be in !' "

So a newspaper reveals Hilda's state of feeling, and so furniture, houses, property, clothes, express the minds, morals, and passions of Mr. Bennett's characters.

This mode of presentation is, of course, perfectly valid, for obviously the accessories of modern life are enormous in their sheer weight, and obviously they have become part of our expression as well as of our experience. But obviously, too, they are not such a great part of experience as Mr. Bennett implies. He tries to make his environments do too much ; he over-emphasises them, and gives them a false impressiveness—a sign, perhaps, that his conscience is not without a suspicion of guilt. In the unnecessary description of St. Andrew's Church in "Riceyman Steps"—unnecessary, for the church appears only to be described, and disappears after that—we can see Mr. Bennett's style in acute distress, becoming embarrassed, and sinking into journalese, in an attempt to conceal the fact that the church is really unimportant. He begins self-consciously : "St. Andrew's Church, of yellow bricks with freestone dressings, a blue slate roof, and a red coping, was designed and erected in the brilliant reign of William IV., whose Government, under Lord Grey, had a pious habit, since lost by governments, of building additional churches in populous parishes at its own expense. Unfortunately its taste in architecture was less laudable than its practical interest in the inculcation among the lowly of the Christian doctrine about the wisdom and propriety of turning the other cheek. St. Andrew's, of a considerably mixed Gothic character, had architecturally nothing whatever to recommend it. Its general proportions, its arched windows, its mullions, its finials, its crosses, its spire, and its buttresses, were all and in every detail utterly silly and offensive."

That, it must be admitted, is Mr. Bennett at his worst. Yet the emptiness and calculated verbosity of the second

sentence tell us a great deal about him ; they always appear when the inspiration fails. They fall like a judgment on Mr. Bennett when he is writing about the artistically irrelevant, when he is padding. Perhaps it is an uneasy conscience which makes him pad the style at the same time, and leads him into the bad taste of periphrases like " in the inculcation among the lowly of the Christian doctrine about."

There is more padding in Mr. Bennett's later novels than in his earlier. The plots are constructed, one might almost think, to make the padding necessary. In " Riceyman Steps," the hero is the owner of a second-hand bookshop ; he is also an antiquarian interested in the streets and history of Clerkenwell ; and, in addition, he is a miser. In other words, his interest, his passion, is for things, not for people. " Elsie and the Child " shows us still more clearly the limitations of the practical and capable view of life. What a mass of machinery, of hotels and yachts, what a disproportionate interest by all the characters in the furnishings of existence, what a poverty and difficulty of human reaction amid this waste of machinery ! In perusing Mr. Bennett's optimistic pages, a weariness of the spirit sometimes falls on one ; one is saddened by the pleasure which these characters have in using that vast mass of machinery, which to most is not a means of pleasure at all, but a bleak necessity.

It is his delight in all the properties of modern life that fixes for us Mr. Bennett's spiritual era. That era is Late Victorian ; it comprises the few decades which saw the complete triumph of machinery and had not yet realised the barrenness of that triumph. The fight against machinery, waged by Carlyle, Ruskin, and Arnold, was over ; the time of weariness in the midst of machinery had not come. Meanwhile, the industrialisation of England had marvellously increased one thing which, more than the growth of knowledge or the decay of religion, was modifying everyday life : it had marvellously increased property. Mr. Bennett would be inconceivable in an age which did not believe religiously in property, either as a thing bringing happiness, or as a thing which will bring happiness in the future, through a more equitable distribution of its resources. He would be equally inconceivable in any age when property was relatively scarce ; in England before the industrial

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revolution. He is the representative of an era of almost universal and absolutely naïve optimism, which is now past. And more than any other writer of that era, he has its limitations and its simplicities. His work as a novelist is dated. But the qualities which make him an anomaly as an artist make him also a very interesting and original literary personality. He has brought into literature qualities which are seldom found there, qualities which perhaps should not be found there, but qualities which, nevertheless, are interesting as well as admirable. They marshal themselves into a unity, and we see behind them a character of weight and integrity, and of a thoroughness which once more takes us back to the happy times of Victoria. And it is perhaps the possession of this character, this personality, which makes Mr. Bennett so interesting to the present generation.



## A Death.

By J. F. HOLMS.

**A**FTER the doctor had gone the pain in his head increased. If he asked again for morphia he would be able to sleep. But sleep meant, and for a week had meant, the possibility of not waking up. If he asked for morphia now he would have to prepare himself. The painful sweat gathered and broke out on his temples ; it trickled into his left eye, and with a clumsy movement he turned his head and smeared it away on the pillow. He was more frightened this time than he had been before ; for each successive agony of fear seemed in its turn the first he had suffered, inescapable as life ; and the other times he had been afraid floated in his mind as memories of safety, passed now for ever, when he had been afraid, it is true, but afraid only in his imagination, afraid as a person in security may suddenly be afraid that he will some time have to be afraid. As he lay his gaze rested on a naked branch that stirred beyond his window against the whitish sky. And, while he watched the branch, he sought again, as he had done before, since this was the position he customarily found least uncomfortable, to realise that it was he—he who had lived the forty years of which his memory told him, the forty years that had brought him to this moment in which he watched the branch moving outside the window—that it was he, his life, that within sight of that branch would soon end. But between him and the comprehension of his death he felt an obstacle which, as a fly on a window-pane, he could neither see nor penetrate, and in which seemed to him to lie the cause of his fear. Could he make his death real his fear would go. But, while he struggled to reach it, the thought of death eluded his grasp as a figure in a mirror. His death was without meaning to him. Only his fear of it, and that only while he felt it, was real. For each day resembled the last. Each day, when he awoke, the days that were past became indistinguishable in his memory, and it seemed to

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him that now for the first time he was face to face with his fear, as it had seemed to him on the day before. He was not ready yet ; another two or three days and what he felt must happen would happen, and his soul would open, the scales fall from his eyes, and fear from his heart. To-morrow was too near, almost to-day ; the day after to-morrow perhaps.

His agony subsided and the pain in his head absorbed his consciousness. He remembered himself walking, a little boy, along a country road on a hot summer afternoon. The white dust lay half-an-inch deep. The words *the Lady on the Ball* formed themselves in the air, and the smell of dust and crushed nettles filled the room. In the circus there had been a trick cyclist. The wheels of the bicycle rose and fell, bumping round the stage. If the pain in his head did not stop the fever would increase. He had heard the doctor tell the nurse that any rise of temperature was dangerous ; if necessary he was to be given morphia. But the doctor knew he was going to die. So did everybody. They knew that in two, three days, a week, he would be dead, and in his bed would be lying someone else, alive when he was dead. They knew it all the time they talked to him and washed him. They knew that they would have to die too some time, it didn't matter. And though they knew he was going to die in a week, they washed him and looked at him as if he were someone like themselves, who was going to die some time, it didn't matter. But he knew more than they. Some time didn't mean never. And when they looked at him he looked back accusingly, threateningly, as if he were God, to tell them that they must feel some time, not never, exactly what he was feeling now. But they looked in his eyes and their faces bore the same calm, solicitous and kindly expression. No one could have told that they knew that in two, three days, a week he would be dead and that in the bed from which they had lifted his body would be another patient, whom they would wash and look at and talk to with the same firm gestures and the same solicitous expression. With pain not their own, once seen, they could sympathise ; to-morrow or to-day one of them might have toothache. Pain was always present in their lives and his pain became in a way their pain. But death happened some time, never. His death they could see, but they could not

feel. If they felt his death as he was feeling it, if only in the vague way they felt his pain as he was feeling it, they would feel their own death and could not bear to look at him. They knew that morphia dulled his pain, but they did not know what it was like to prefer torture to the possibility of dying before one was ready. He thought of his body lying in his bed after he had died ; he could see them straightening and pulling out his limbs. He supposed he was washed naked all over. He was a dark man, and the thought of others looking on his naked, flaccid and dead body filled him with disgust and nausea ; but the images formed in his mind and his fear was forgotten.

He determined to try to sleep without morphia. He tried to imagine himself a month ago, a normal, irritable man suffering from a severe headache. And to soothe the pain he tried to imagine a woman's hand stroking his forehead with a cool, regular and caressing touch. The hand moved gently and his breathing grew easier. That was enough ; he could sleep now. But the hand continued stroking his forehead. Each touch dragged and tore his nerves. He made a noise in his throat to attract the attention of the nurse. She came across the room and began to stroke his forehead. He recognised her at once. He had known for some time that Frances had come to the home as a nurse. She looked at him kindly and sadly, and, seeming not to notice his convulsed features, continued passing her hand from the centre of his forehead up towards the crown of his head with a slow, monotonous movement. Her eyes never left his, and, tortured with agony and hopeless lust, he felt her hand rubbing its way through flesh and skull, which peeled and shredded like blotting-paper under the friction of his wet forefinger on his desk at school. She stooped to kiss him, but the pain burnt in his grooved skull like white-hot iron, and, turning his head on the pillow, he saw the grey distempered wall and a white curtain moving. Someone had opened the window.

He touched the bell at his bedside and asked for morphia. The pain left him and the room began to grow dark. He could sleep now. But before he could sleep he remembered something he had to do at home. For years he had meant to do it, but he had kept putting it off from year to year till he

had got used to the pain of knowing he had not done it, and to the shadowy, unreal and hopeless life caused by the knowledge that the pain was there, even when he did not feel it, just as a man gets used to cancer. Of late years, in fact, he had almost ceased to feel the pain, and the knowledge that it was there had become as profound, familiar and little-considered a part of his life as the appearance of his own features or the sound of his wife's voice. His memories came thick and clear. After he had ceased to feel the pain at all at other times it had long persisted immediately on waking up in the morning. All the early years of his marriage he used to wake heavy with pain and fear. But that life and that pain, those mornings and the memory of them were so long past that they rose new before him as though he were reading a book. He could not remember when that part of his life came to an end, but at some time or other his life had become as he knew it now—or had known it a month ago. He had settled down, made money, and the quarrels with his wife had grown rarer and rarer till they too became first memories and were finally forgotten. The climbing anguish rose through his heart, but his soul felt free and light. He got out of bed and dressed himself, his gaze fixed on his moving hands that trembled slightly. He met no one as he went out. It was almost dark outside and the streets were wet. A long straight road led up hill to outlying suburbs. On each side were square houses, each in its garden. Though nearly dark there was no light visible in any house, nor had the street lamps been lit. Pavement, trees, the mould in the gardens, the bricks in the walls, the iron railings were soaked and rotten with soot. After he had walked for some time, at the corner of each side street he felt on his face a breath of cold air that smelt of rust and empty spaces. He was near the edge of the city now, and he turned to the right. He had some difficulty in finding the house he was looking for, into which he had not been for twenty years. Unlocking the side door he went in; he tried to lock it after him, but the key would not fit, so with difficulty he pushed the rusty bolt across and, suddenly convulsed with terror, shook the door softly to see if it would hold. It held, and not daring to shake harder, which he knew would start the socket, he turned and saw



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through the small cobwebbed window that the moon had risen and was shining on the figure of a policeman standing silent and motionless among the garden trees, his round cheek gleaming in the sad moonlight like wax. Silently he turned away, and, older than he had been as a child, recognised and struggled with the fear that was beginning to stifle him. He came to the large bedroom. The red-shaded electric lamp by the bedside burned dully, and getting into bed he settled himself to read. The light flickered, went out, flickered again ; he tried quietly to screw the bulb more firmly into the socket, but the glass crumpled stiffly under his hand like papier mâché. A dull red glow, however, persisted. It was nearly time now. Slowly he forced his legs over the bedside. Nothing moved, and he strained his eyes to penetrate the gloom and to see what he had come for. The light began to burn brighter, burnt white and strong, and he saw at his feet the white, naked and waxen figure of a little boy, whose wide open eyes stared at him with triumphant malice. But now the malice faded and in its stead dawned sweet shame, fear, and fawning expectance. The chains fell from his soul and limbs ; rage streamed red-hot through him ; leaping out of bed he seized the stiff small body, and, whirling it above his head, repeatedly crashed its skull against the brass bed rail, which quivered noiselessly at each blow.

His face and limbs distorted, he struggled up to consciousness. Minutes passed of an extremity of fear that obliterated thought and humanity. Slowly the mist passed from his eyes, beside him the night-light burned dim and steady, and reality spread its long habit of safety solid around him. Truth and substance faded from his horror, withdrawn, laden with a thousand memories, thither whence it had come, leaving its empty recollection as a toy for thought. I haven't had such a nightmare since I was a child, he thought. But beneath the security that enfolded him grew an uneasiness that became pain. It slid into his consciousness, and reality, familiar, permanent and secure, reminded him that he was going to die. His trapped soul turned in the net. Whether awake or asleep he had suffered that anguish of fear. Even if he had never felt that terror before and might never feel it again ; if he lived and forgot it ; that he had felt it once meant that it

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existed in the universe, that it existed and might exist again for him. Only in life could he be safe, and in a hundred hours or so he would die. "God help me, God help me!" His features were hideous, but no tears came from his burning eyes. "Almighty God, let me live and not die!" But pang upon pang rose bursting through body and brain, lifting his stiffened body till he sat upright in bed, his arms, naked to the elbows, round which clung the crumpled sleeves of his pyjamas, stretched out before him rigid as crowbars. His eyes ceased to implore, and, seeming to grow larger, fixed on the wall opposite a look of blank and astonished anger. From his mouth gushed blood and a muffled clamour; a nurse hurried in, and putting her arms, with their white starched cuffs, round his body, eased it carefully back on to the bed.

# Poetry and the Absolute: the Case of Rimbaud.

BY SAMUEL HOARE.

THE problem presented by Rimbaud's abandonment of poetry at the age of nineteen and his silence for the remaining eighteen years of his life has generally been considered rather in relation to the facts of his life than to the nature of his poetry. What manner of man he was appears clearly enough from his history—the successive dashes from his home in the Ardennes to Paris, the participation in the insurrection of the Commune, the roving partnership with Verlaine and the subsequent vagabondage through Europe, the long years as merchant, trader, gun-runner and explorer in Africa. The force, the hardness, the indomitable will and irreconcilable pride displayed at every stage of this history are invoked to explain the supreme renunciation of his career: when the ideals on which he has based the whole weight of his energies—the revolution of society, the inauguration of a new era of emancipation for humanity, and of a new poetry emancipated by *l'alchimie du verbe*—crumble successively beneath him, he has the strength to face his disillusionment, to turn his back for ever on all the objectives towards which his life has hitherto been directed, and withdraw, in a proud silence, from Europe and the literary scene. More precise enquirers have endeavoured to assign to some definite event in this history the function of a turning point—it has thus been suggested that his final abandonment of literature dates and originates from the rupture of his relations with Verlaine.

These explanations, so far as they go, contain some truth. The abandonment *is* in the nature of a disillusionment, there *is* here something like the failure of a strong man who still

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remains unbeaten.\* And we must add, before leaving this aspect of the matter, that for us, surfeited with more questionable heroisms, there is something admirable in this thwarted career : the effort of Rimbaud remains heroic and Promethean, as he envisaged it himself. Here, as in his poetry, he is hard, diamond-like, flawless even : for about the violence of his most devastating gestures there remains always an essential nobility, and the harshest of his jeering cries are dignified by the accents of passion and of suffering.

But the real interest of the problem—an interest that remains unsatisfied by the theories summarily indicated above—is that we have here a unique case of a poet of the first order who ceases creative activity at the height of his creative power. Its analysis should throw some light on poetry in general and Rimbaud's poetry in particular, for it belongs rather to the field of psychology than to that of history. The enormous force and vitality of Rimbaud suggest that his career is less than anyone's to be explained in terms of the impact on him of external events, and the extraordinary precocity of his genius suggests that we have to deal with a character, an attitude to life, already fully formed, and little likely to be subject to a progression of enthusiasms and disillusionments. It seems more profitable therefore to disregard "the facts" altogether, to treat the question purely as one of literary psychology. On this basis we must take it that Rimbaud's abandonment of poetry was *inevitable*. We assume, just as the scientist assumes the uniformity of nature, a uniformity of Rimbaudian nature : the forces which produced the poetry must be those which have led to its abandonment ; the poetry itself involves the existence of what must render its production impossible. The subject of the investigation is not now the activity of the man but the nature of the poet's mind, and for the knowledge of this there is ample material in his works.

Rimbaud is a free spirit : an antinomian and a nihilist,

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\* On se demande souvent la raison pour laquelle Rimbaud quitta les lettres. Le doute est impossible. Seul, évité par la race de ceux-là même qui cherchent à réparer l'injustice et la recommencent envers d'autres, écœuré des cafés, trouvant que ce joli monde ne méritait pas son suicide et que le suicide était un peu ridicule, il choisit le seul dénouement possible.—Jean Cocteau : "Le Secret Professionnel."



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he denies everything. This attitude is generally taken to be common to all the poets termed *maudits*, including, for instance, Verlaine, who was, I think, the inventor of this description. But there is a great difference between the cold intellectual ferocity of Rimbaud's revolt and the naïf perversity, punctuated by bouts of self-commiseration, of Verlaine. Rimbaud's attitude is not, like Verlaine's, emotional in its origin ; it might rather be defined as an intuitive perception of the inadequacy, for any absolute purpose, of the structure of values on which civilisation is built. It is a fiercer, more militant form of the refusal of Ivan Karamazov, who wanted to hand God back the ticket. And it is not without significance that this spirit should enter European literature almost simultaneously in Dostoevsky's novel and in the poetry of Rimbaud, for it is an entirely modern discovery, the product of a new form of consciousness, as distinctive perhaps for its own period, which is still ours, as the eighteenth century rationalism of Voltaire or the sentimental humanitarianism of the early Romantics is for theirs. Generally it has been rather watered down and subjected to compromises—in Dostoevsky, for instance, it is put up for demolition (though against Ivan Karamazov and the magnificent fable of the Grand Inquisitor Father Zossima makes a poor showing). We find it again in Laforgue, here much diluted by irony and a self-conscious and amusing sentimentalism. In our own day it has had a remarkable flowering in the shape of Mr. James Joyce's "Ulysses." In Rimbaud it exists, one may say, in the pure state.

This has important consequences for his poetry : the world as well as the spirit of that poetry is nihilistic. The substance of this strange world is, indeed, identical with that of our familiar—all too familiar—universe, whose objects and ideas are rendered with an astonishing hardness and brilliance ; but their relations have been entirely revolutionised.

It may be said that the aim of all poetry is the establishment of relations. We live in a world whose phenomena are all tagged and labelled, ranged ready in categories in the mind ; disregarding the labels and contemplating the reality, the poet perceives relations between the labelled things ; by expressing these relations he makes us, who had hitherto been content

to read the labels, aware of the realities which they represent. The nature of the relations perceived depends upon the poet's mental make-up; they form a system, and it is therefore justifiable to speak of the world or universe of the poet, an individual world, which these relations characterise. In its intervention between us and the world of actuality the mind of the poet is a prism distorting phenomena into forms of significance, but always in accordance with certain laws of refraction determined by its own structure. Now the peculiarity of the relations which Rimbaud establishes is that they have no finality and form no system. In this universe there are no laws; nothing is imposed of necessity; the relations to be established are limitless, and the poet's choice is free among an infinity of possibilities. It is, in fact, a universe in a state of chaos, over whose arrangements in patterns of an arbitrary and exquisite beauty the poet presides with the detachment of a god. Its elements are so denuded of reference to their functions in the actual world that they can be built like little coloured blocks into these strange mosaics; curious transpositions are possible:

*Une mosquée à la place d'une usine, une école de tambours  
faite par des anges, des calèches sur les routes du ciel; un  
salon au fond d'un lac.*

The one fixed thing, the *point de repère* in this flux of interchangeable forms, is the poet himself. About the movements of his mind the world shapes itself like iron filings about a magnet. At the height that he has reached the only important fact about the universe is his contemplation of it. He exists: he is aware of the universe: the universe of which he is aware is therefore justified;

*. . . j'y suis, j'y suis toujours.*

The "problems" of the universe belong to a lower plane, for in *his* universe the significance of anything is measured solely by its capacity to be used for the purposes of his poetry, to be flung into the crucibles of his mind for *l'alchimie du verbe* to work on. All other values than this are abolished, they are simply non-existent. Only as material for his superb poetry has the universe any value at all. His poetry is therefore profoundly non-moral: it is quite literally beyond good and evil.

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In this attitude there is a kind of mysticism ; one remembers Claudel's designation of Rimbaud as a mystic in the savage state. It has its analogies in English poetry—in the poetry, such as that of Wordsworth or Blake, which takes advantage of momentary perceptions of a world that has become completely unified. But these momentary perceptions seem, in their case, to be achieved unconsciously and as if by miracle, in the course of an effort towards some other aim, whereas with Rimbaud the abolition of all values allows him to start consciously with this absolute vision as his point of departure.

The universe regarded as material for poetry and nothing more: this is surely *pure* poetry. It seems, indeed, too pure to exist. Like certain chemicals, poetry cannot long exist in the absolutely pure state. The complete detachment which makes it possible is an attitude that cannot be maintained indefinitely.

For though, for the purposes of poetry, the universe is in Rimbaud's power, for the purposes of existence it is not. As a god, as a creator, he is free ; as a human being he is in chains. Every poet is in some degree involved in a dichotomy of this nature, but since the values by which he lives are those which his poetry affirms, the transition from the creator to the human being becomes possible ; there is simply, in the forward flow of existence, a continual movement from one level to another and back again. But in Rimbaud's case there is a complete severance ; the poetry can only exist by a denial of all values, and the denial of all values renders his own human existence valueless, without purpose or meaning. It reduces him to existing merely on the unorganised series of his reactions to the external world. Now it is possible for an individual, perhaps even for a poet, to exist hand-to-mouth on his sensations in this way, but only if he is not sufficiently intellectually interested to be concerned with the problem of values ; the intellect, on the contrary, which denies all values, demonstrates by its denial a preoccupation with the problem, and for it, therefore, such an existence is impossible. Having accomplished its work of demolition it must go on, past denial. It has the choice of acceptance, or of the affirmation of a new value. There is no middle way, short of abandoning intellectual activity altogether.

At a certain stage in Rimbaud's development he is faced

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with these alternatives. That the problem did not pose itself earlier, that Rimbaud's poetry exists at all, is no doubt because, for all its maturity in the literary sense, his is the poetry of adolescence, of the period when the universe can be regarded with the detachment proper to one not yet inextricably involved in it, the period of the considerable mental clearances that precede construction. With him this period synchronises with a natural bias of his mind, and perhaps this conjunction of time and temperament explains—if miracles can ever be explained—the extraordinary perfection of his art. Set free by his Satanic spirit from the labour of abstracting and grouping the elements of the outer world into a fixed framework of his own, he can turn all his forces on the problems of formal expression. He thus reverses curiously the normal progression of the poet, who, coming to terms almost unconsciously with life, spends years of labour on the construction of an art; with Rimbaud the art is complete almost from the outset, and it is in the attempt to come to some terms with life, to give his activity some direction, that he is defeated.

At the stage when the problem becomes insistent the reflection of his spiritual perplexity becomes evident in his poetry. Towards the close of *Bateau Ivre* there appears something that has never before intruded into his hard, objective world—a vague nostalgia, an uneasy regret, the personal confession of a poet who has hitherto been able to include himself, like any other object, in the detached indifference of his vision—

*Or, moi, bateau perdu sous les cheveux des anses, . . . .  
Je regrette l'Europe aux anciens parapets.*

and further on,

*Mais, vrai, j'ai trop pleuré. Les aubes sont navrantes,  
Toute lune est atroce et tout soleil amer.*

He is tired of the enormous waves of his imaginary sea, his leviathans and giant serpents; all that he desires now is an expanse of still water where in the twilight a solitary child launches a paper boat. Uneasiness, a gaze turned upon himself and upon his own past, characterise the few remaining poems he is to write; even technically considered they mark a change. Take this for example:



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Peut-être un soir m'attend  
Où je boirai tranquille  
En quelque bonne ville,  
Et mourrai plus content  
Puisque je suis patient.

Si mon mal se résigne,  
Si jamais j'ai quelque or,  
Choisirai-je le Nord  
Ou le pays des vignes ? . . .  
Ah ! songer est indigne,

Puisque c'est pure perte ;  
Et si je redeviens  
Le voyageur ancien,  
Jamais l'auberge verte  
Ne peut bien m'être ouverte.

This pure and slender melodic line is utterly different from the heavily orchestrated harmonies of his earlier work. The poetry of his past is for him over and done with ; he has come to a dead end. His rebellion has become renunciation, his pride withdrawn into melancholy.

For the movement of the mind which has produced this change and which will ultimately lead to his complete abandonment of poetry we have the evidence of *Une Saison en Enfer*, written precisely at the period of crisis, and difficult and contradictory because it is the faithful reflection of an internal conflict.

It is impossible to over-estimate the value of this book : it ought to be regarded as the Bible of the modern consciousness. In the few pages of a confession of the year 1873 there is put on record a certain agony of the spirit which has never found expression in literature before, and which is, in all essentials, that with which our own generation half-inarticulately struggles. Its only literary analogy is with certain inward dialogues of Villon, a spirit with whom Rimbaud has much in common and whose poetry we know to have been one of the formative influences upon him.

In one aspect this colloquy of a mind divided against itself is the record of a search for an absolute value. For Rimbaud,

as we have seen, the choice is acceptance of those values which he has denied or the affirmation of a new one. Acceptance for him is impossible . . . *quant au bonheur établi, domestique ou non, non, je ne peux pas.* And his search is equally abortive, for the intellect which has denied so strenuously is completely immobilised by its own previous activity. When all values have been destroyed there is nothing left to build with. When denial has closed all the exits there is no way out. Nevertheless he tries vainly to lay hold on something firm in the meaningless flux in which he is involved. He envisages solutions, to reject them almost at once. Tired of regarding humanity with the contempt it deserves, he will try charity :

*j'ai songé à rechercher la clef du festin ancien, où je reprendrais peut-être appétit.*

*La charité est cette clef.—Cette inspiration prouve que j'ai rêvé !*

And again :

*Je bénirai la vie. J'aimerai mes frères.*

The spectacle of Rimbaud blessing life and loving his brothers is a strange, almost comic, fantasy. *N'aime pas ses frères qui veut.* And he is aware that it is impossible. His search for an absolute value is bound to end in failure, for his nature cannot accept any value as absolute. And yet his intellect finds it impossible to function on negatives—it keeps demanding, like Archimedes, somewhere to stand. So that we find him ready to believe in anything at all, if only he could believe :

*Ah ! je suis tellement délaissé que j'offre à n'importe quelle divine image des élanis vers la perfection.*

Sometimes he seems to envisage some kind of miracle ; a light will appear in his darkness, a new way of life will become possible, and a sudden conversion or change of nature will solve his problem by abolishing it. But the *éclair* with which he is illuminated turns out always to be some derisory ideal—religion, or *le travail humain*—which he has little difficulty in disposing of.

Meanwhile his retreat back to the emancipated universe of his creation is already cut off. That creation was only

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possible while his spirit was completely free ; and the search for something which would give some direction to his activity constitutes in itself a limit on its freedom :

*Moi !* he exclaims, *moi qui me suis dit mage ou ange, dispensé de toute morale, je suis rendu au sol, avec un devoir à chercher et la réalité rugueuse à étreindre ! Paysan !* The endeavour to grapple with *la réalité rugueuse*, the intrusion of its fixed forms, the admission of a judgment of value, shatters the universe of his creation. He is aware of this :

*Eh bien ! je dois enterrer mon imagination et mes souvenirs ! Une belle gloire d'artiste et de conteur emportée !* And thus at the close of one of the prose poems of *Les Illuminations*, evocative of a city of a fabulous and nightmare-like reality, he exclaims :

*Quels bons bras, quelle belle heure me rendront cette région d'où viennent mes sommeils et mes moindres mouvements ?* And elsewhere in *Les Illuminations* is the same sense that he is exiled from the universe in which his spirit was at home, the country of tents of red meat, arctic flowers which do not exist, prairies of steel and emerald, prodigious plantations where savage gentlemen chase their newspapers under a created light. Some of these *Illuminations* are simply a constatation of his position—*Vies*, for example :

. . . *A présent, gentilhomme d'une campagne maigre au ciel sobre, j'essaye de m'émouvoir au souvenir de l'enfance mendicante. . . . Je ne regrette pas ma vieille part de gaiété divine : l'air sobre de cette aigre campagne alimente fort bien mon atroce scepticisme. Mais comme ce scepticisme ne peut désormais être mis en œuvre, et que, d'ailleurs, je suis dévoué à un trouble nouveau,—j'attends de devenir un très méchant fou.*

. . . *Mon devoir m'est remis. Il ne faut même plus songer à cela. Je suis réellement d'outre-tombe, et pas de commissions.*

The poetry of his past is therefore left behind him ; he has been driven out of his garden of Eden and cannot return. There remains the further question whether another poetry is not possible, and why civilisation too has to be abandoned in favour of the deserts of Harrar. To this *Une Saison en Enfer* gives a perfectly definite reply. Since he has reached an intellectual *impasse*, since on the plane of the intellect his problem is insoluble, the energies that were employed in the

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creation of an emancipated universe out of the raw material of the world are now to be devoted to another end, to a construction in existence. He puts his trust in what nowadays we should term the unconscious, letting himself go without further questioning on the current of life, abandoning all attempt to attain finality by way of the intellect :

*. . . C'est la veille. Recevons tous les influx de vigueur et de tendresse réelle. Et, à l'aurore, armé d'une ardente patience, nous entrerons aux splendides villes.*

If he is to possess truth it is to be a different truth, and in a different way ; the last words of the book announce the new aim :

*posséder la vérité dans une âme et un corps.*

But his problem arose out of his conflict with the values of Western civilisation, a civilisation which is itself a construction of the intellect, in which the intellect is supreme, and in which, if he lives at all, he must live by the intellect. He states this clearly :

*L'esprit est autorité, il veut que je sois en Occident. Il faudrait le faire taire pour conclure comme je voulais.*

It is this authority of the intellect, working at lower levels than his own, that has made it impossible for him to make the best of two worlds, to exist in the modern Western world, conforming to the dictates of its civilisation, and at the same time retaining, as a private habitation of the spirit, that free created world of his which he calls in contrast the East, or the Garden of Eden. The philosophers say :

*Vous êtes en Occident, mais libre d'habiter dans votre Orient, quelque ancien qu'il vous le faille,—et d'y habiter bien. Ne soyez pas vaincu.*

To this his reply is simple :

*Philosophes, vous êtes de votre Occident.*

The abdication of the life of the intellect involves, therefore, withdrawal from the life of the West. He had never compromised with the bourgeois civilisation that he hates : now he need no longer even combat it. Discarding it once for all he disappears into Africa. Poetry, even poetry based on denial of it, is part of that civilisation ; he writes not another line.



## Pioneers, O Pioneers !

By EDGELL RICKWORD.

THE boy turned in bed and put up his hand to the switch. As he pressed the button from him he saw the colours fade off the backs of his books. In the faint light which came from the window they stood out like rocks against the snow of the walls. His mind yearned towards them, not so much for their buried ore as with a friendly sentiment, such as one feels for the clothes and habits of a person more familiar than exciting.

But as he fell asleep he thought most of their potentiality ; of the next day, when he would dig in them, and of all the following days when he would steep himself in them and wade through them and stride over them, to further half-seen peaks of knowledge and power ; to a mythical future whose attributes he conceived, not in details, but vastly, as a golden heroic age of nobility, generosity and command.

"Les régions polaires," says Dictionnaire Larousse, "connaissent une nuit de plusiers mois." As he stumbled along the darkness appeared less thick and a spark here and there in the snow flamed and went out. At first he could see no sun, but later a dull crimson disc swelled like a boil in the grey skin of the sky. In its subdued glow the transparent Arctic flowers were faintly visible. Their slender crystal stems were fluid green like deep water, their blossom a bare grey outline in the air like wine-glasses under water. No sound came there, no wing. The reindeer stood far off in herds. There were no shadows, only the lichen, sombre green and red, bearded the faces of old rocks.

So the year-days passed over slowly. Utter darkness became filled with shadowy masses of cliff and boulder. The dull sun rolled heavily over the horizon and shapes were absorbed again in the thick of night. He felt the panic of an explorer separated from his carriers. He lost count of days and a little thought expanded to a mania. Like

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a berg drifting south, the transparent temple of sun-life dissolved in the warm stream of night-life! Flesh and flower exchanged their forms. The distance was illimitable, the confusion ultimate.

Presently a gigantic cromlech, the Ritz-Astoria, reared a thousand storeys; foursquare honeycomb, oozing rich light from clammy cells overbrimmed by the summer of prosperity. Millionaires, atonied of all functions, whizzed by in bed-chairs fitted with wireless telephones. The poets of the Celtic twilight had all been gathered into one hall for an evening's entertainment, or was it the souging of thirty express elevators? In the Palm-Court the little nieces of the millionaires, as once the nieces of cardinals, waited to be summoned from their lipsticks and their cocktails.

There were no chamber-pots in the bedrooms, which explained the vast sewer dwarfing the St. Gothard, through whose acrid darkness he stumbled towards a distant illumination.

On stately terraces magnified from the Trianon of Versailles, exquisitely tailored as American girls, they stared arrogantly at the reindeer herds massed like a forest against the flickering horizon (inclusive terms). Slim, cold yet provocative in their slender suits trimmed in a last ironic gesture with monkey-fur, they eyed the impotent glamour of the moon. In one of the closed balconies for the coloured races a pregnant negress dreamed of moon-eaten swamps and yearned for the mangoes the fast cargo-plane was hurrying from the experimental farm behind Lagos. He threaded the extensive drying-grounds, through the bleached glare of linen. Ten thousand towels were employed nightly.

On a raised platform men thrust and pounded on instruments of brass. No tune came to him, but it was as if he looked down a pink whorled shell, spirals of mother-of-pearl flung out from the beating stick of a little man at the focus of sound. He moved towards a street of booths, mingling unnoticed with the crowd, past glittering fountains of sarsaparilla, where young men sat gravely drinking. By chance into a booth.

"It's a dime to touch, dame." The show-women's squawk.

"Nothing doing." A girl as lovely as a Lyceum heiress,

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standing in front of the rank crowd, her gloved hand poised like a butterfly over the painted fruits on the fat lady's thigh.

"Aw, come on now, yer ken have a finger in the pocket-edition for a nickel, darling." Pushed forward a wicker cradle where a babe lay in drugged silence, blown pneumatic limbs testifying its genuine parentage.

The girl fingered her own rich sack, flushed, conquered. She stared insolently at the men round her. None offered. At last she leaned sumptuously forward and whispered to a scraggy youth in a high stripped vulcanite collar. Patrician and Gladiator. Baudelaire's nightmare of democratic degradation—*dans le berceau, elle songe à se vendre un million*—outpaced by reality.

He was still dazed when he found himself in front of a large stucco hall. It stood at the end of the fair, its entrance so placed that it might be the stomach of which the lane of booths was the throat. At the mouth of the sac a turnstile extracted alimentary juices from undigested throng. Here he paused a moment while out of the broth of sound of hucksters, and balls flopping against the canvas backs of shies, and the corrosive melody of the merry-go-round, a trickle of blobs of living meat found its way to this gate. They came neither swiftly nor reluctantly, but with the earnest stare of those who know that they are doing their duty. The girls, vivacious before, set their faces in a stupid expression such as he remembered having seen on the faces of women in picture galleries.

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The hall is divided into a number of compartments, and in each is a group of life-like figures set in various scenery, the colouring, composition and grouping of the figures recalling certain pictures seen in European galleries ; but the details are all novel. The legends are in Gothic lettering.

Sacred and Profane Love. A stenographer sitting at a knee-hole desk, with typewriter, dictaphone and filing cabinet.

The Annunciation. A surgeon in white uniform hands to a girl who has just turned from an electric cooking-range, a medicine phial containing less than a spoonful of spawny fluid. A half-open window shows Joseph hard at work making entries in a ledger. The meaning of this was obscure till he moved near enough to read the lettering on the phial, which ran

Et puis décantez lestement  
L'homuncule dans la bouteille,

or words to that effect.

He passed many others which had no meaning for him, and only paused for a glance at a Raphaelesque "Ascension," in which the typical citizen was elevated above an adoring group on a cloud shaped like a manager's roll-top desk. The last compartment was fronted with a placard, on which he read :

Original work by the biggest living artist.

Life-size group of the Brunswick Martyrs

Commemorating 300th Anniversary of lost expedition  
which opened the route to the Arctic.

Escublio, Paxton, Trepan, Asluphor and Narcissus  
Pioneers of Civilisation

As they were found frozen in their last camp

On the site of the hotel Ritz-Astoria.

That world crumbled in the fracas of a passing milk-cart, and he curled closer in the warm bed, wondering if his slow and painful exploration of the intellectual Polar Circle was also preliminary to the spread of banality. The yellow morning sun smeared itself on the oaten walls of his room, and the door through which he must enter the real world looked like the bite in a slice of bread and butter. The sweet familiar taste was strong in his mouth, so that he did not know whether to swallow or to spit.



## Comments and Reviews

COMPLETE POEMS OF EMILY DICKINSON. Secker.  
21s. net.

Amherst in 1830 must, as far as one can judge, have been an intellectual kitchen-garden, where all the plants were cultivated primarily for domestic use. Yet it was there that the delicate, exotic flower of Emily Dickinson's mind blossomed and flourished, unknown to her great contemporaries—Poe, Melville, Hawthorne—and but little influenced by them. Her poetry is intensely personal, and, by the lengths to which she carried it, she made her philosophy of individualism also peculiarly her own. The two most important facts of her life are her sequestration after the three years (1853-56) spent in Washington and Philadelphia, and the puritanical atmosphere of her home. Apart from this, we know little, save for the evidence of a few published letters and her poetry. But though the latter has now appeared in a complete edition, one cannot agree with her biographer, Mrs. Bianchi, that "explanation of her is as impertinent as unnecessary"; one would wish for a further revelation of her personality than her poetry affords.

This is, indeed, a quite legitimate curiosity, for in Emily Dickinson's case poetry was but a part of the temple which she built for the protection and development of her soul. It is almost a condition of the mystic individualism which she practised that her poetry should not express her whole personality. Withdrawing more and more completely from the world, she was careless, sometimes contemptuous, of their understanding, and if one desire that understanding, one must take into consideration the letters, which serve as complement and commentary to her poetic works.

The two, in fact, are often but arbitrarily distinguished, for though, according to her statement to Colonel Higginson, she wrote but little poetry before she was thirty, one can trace in the correspondence prior to that time, the development of that epigrammatic brilliance of mind which is her most personal characteristic. Of her only sister she wrote when she was twenty-five: "Sisters are brittle things; God was penurious with me, which makes me shrewd with Him." Already she was distinguishing *her* God from the dour, uncomfortable deity whom her relations worshipped tediously in the Amherst meeting-house. This was the beginning of her revolt. And it is probable that about this time some emotional shock, translated by her mystical nature into a spiritual revaluation, occurred to hasten her withdrawal into herself in an effort towards stability. From then on the habit of seclusion grew on her. It

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is as though some fundamental weakness, a lack of spiritual initiative, restricted her search for truth to her own soul ; for it was not fear that drove her to shun people—her exploration is, indeed, remarkable for its boldness. She could write :

“ Heavenly Father, take to Thee  
The supreme iniquity,  
Fashioned by Thy candid hand  
In a moment contraband.  
Though to trust us seems to us  
More respectful—‘ we are dust.’  
We apologise to Thee  
For Thine own duplicity.”

It is in such poems of negation that the trenchancy of her mind is most clearly revealed. When she comes to make the statement of her faith, an animistic belief in nature, her vigour is replaced by charm, and her force is often dissipated in quaintness.

For this reason Emily Dickinson is a stimulating, rather than a satisfying poet. Her positive ideas or emotions are too often weakened by a timidity in the face of realisation. Life was to her an exhilarating and passionate experience, but though it was “ a pang, sweeter to bear than to omit,” it was also a “ spell so exquisite that everything conspires to break it.” It was not that she feared death, but that the awe with which she contemplated eternity made her enjoyment of life tremulous, her reactions to it ultimately a little dubious. Her point of view had no place for the general. Always she was whittling her consciousness down to fit the limits of her own subjective experience, and, since that was extremely restricted in its scope, her attitude is very intense but at the same time æsthetically bigoted.

The power of her verse is largely due to her cultivation of an unusual and personal angle of vision, which strips objects and concepts alike of their conventional attributes, revealing them clearly and arrestingly by an individual process of re-assimilation :

“ There is a solitude of space,  
A solitude of sea,  
A solitude of death, but these  
Society shall be,  
Compared with that profounder site,  
That polar privacy,  
A Soul admitted to itself :  
Finite Infinity.”

The terseness of her style, which she uses sometimes with the greatest effect, is often disappointing. She pursues an idea from what is apparently a shred of observation, but stops short of its full development ; and this is her greatest weakness, arising from her inability to poise concepts in an inevitable balance. But when

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all is said, Emily Dickinson remains as a virile, stimulating personality who frequently gave in her poetry the true expression of herself. The restrictions which she imposed on her experience reacted on her verse, leaving it sometimes dry and colourless, but more often with the incisive force of her ascetic mind.

DOUGLAS GARMAN.

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MILTON. By DENIS SAURAT. Cape. 15s. net.

The difficulty in dealing with Milton has always been that few or none of those who admire his spacious and sunlit verse have had the patience to consider his politico-religious opinions, while few who did consider his opinions had any feeling for his verse. Milton was a revolutionary. So, for that matter, was Shelley. But Milton had the luck to see, as poor Shelley did not, his revolution translated into politics. What Milton hated, the men of the class then governing England also hated. What Milton loved was loved by the best men of his time. Milton, in short, was no lonely eccentric like Shelley, but a successful politician. The Commonwealth collapsed around him, and he returned to poetry. But, beyond the slightest doubt, he would with unction have exchanged all the eternal fame given by the poems he dictated in his blindness for the knowledge that he could still serve the Commonwealth.

M. Saurat does not quite, for all his admirable learning, understand this. He appears to approve those American critics who protest against Milton being called a Puritan because to their imaginations the word "Puritan" suggests a bleak New England farm. "Milton," they exclaim, "knew several languages; lived in London; drank beer and pipes of tobacco. He could not, then, have been a Puritan as old Aunt Agnes was. He was too well educated. He must have been a child of the Renaissance, a Humanist." But Milton was a Puritan, and, *pace* M. Saurat, a typical Puritan, at a time when Puritanism signified not merely a ritual of abstinence and profession, but a devouring flame of godliness.

The nearest, I suppose, that anyone living to-day got to the understanding of Milton was in the first weeks of the German War. Then, and then only, we all of us did more or less distinctly imagine a clean conflict of right and wrong, of black and white. The emotion nourished by those times has died, and we no longer accept the simple antithesis which made those times endurable. And that, after all, was a national war. But Milton's was a war of ideas. The Commonwealth might have become Christ's Kingdom. It did not. Instead it dribbled into failure. And Milton was blind, an ex-bureaucrat, just saved by his unimportance from the scaffold. Time moved on. In utter defeat, out of a humble cottage, a blind man, whose private life was scarcely less squalid than his public, a blind man casually pardoned for sedition, sent out "Paradise Lost," "Paradise Regained," and "Samson Agonistes." Pungent

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poets like Marvell, mellifluous poets like Cowley, were his contemporaries. If Milton stands so high above them, it is not by reason of his studies, his talents, or even his life-long nourished ambition to be a great poet. His character made him great, and the times in which he tested it. Hard, humourless, egotistic; quite unamiable and certainly magnificent, he fertilised the talents of Tennyson with the genius of Gladstone.

To this aspect of Milton, M. Saurat directs but a little of his attention, and he is certainly justified in ignoring the obscure history of the Commonwealth, which Gardiner has scarcely done more than Guizot to illuminate, which is still bescummed by Carlyle's froth, since the critic is not enjoined to take on the duties of the historian. M. Saurat uses the modern method, two modern methods; he ascribes Milton's intellectual development to his emotional experiences and his expression to his library. On the former procedure little need be said. It is true that Milton wrote on divorce because his own experiments in matrimony made him unhappy, and on the liberty of the press because he had cause to dislike the censorship, but it is not the whole truth, for occasions should not be confounded with causes. What is really questionable is M. Saurat's treatment of the way in which Milton was influenced by what he had read. The classics, the Italians, Jonson, Shakespeare are subordinated to the Kabbala and Robert Fludd. Now, M. Saurat's conjectures are very interesting, and his discovery of passages in the first and nineteenth books of the Zohar parallel with passages in "Paradise Lost" highly important. But is Milton, "Man and Thinker," pinned down thereby? Was not Gifford in his insistence on Milton's debt to the Jonsonian phrase more illuminating? It is not what we read but what we select from our reading that is important. M. Saurat's unfortunate appendix on the chances of Milton being a victim of hereditary syphilis suggests that subtlety rather than adequacy in Miltonic criticism interests him.

H. C. HARWOOD.

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THE COMMON READER. By VIRGINIA WOOLF. (Hogarth Press, 12s. 6d.)

There is no explicit link between the literary essays which make up this volume and to be just to Mrs. Woolf it would be necessary to criticise each of them separately, the longer ones at any rate, for it is a great virtue in these pieces to stimulate a sort of private discussion in the reader's consciousness. If however the reader is of the sort that finds discussion harsh and unprofitable, the picturesque is sufficiently in evidence to enable him to ignore very comfortably the deeper implications of Mrs. Woolf's criticism. The essay called "The Pastons and Chaucer" is to our mind the most substantial in the book and it shows as clearly as any what is



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constantly the subject of her inquiry, the influence on a writer of the society in which he lives—the relation of artist and audience.

Analysing the freedom with which Chaucer absorbs into his verse every kind of experience, ignorant of our uncomfortable distinction between the poetic and the unpoetic subject, Mrs. Woolf says

“ He could sound every note in the language instead of finding a great many of the best gone dumb from disuse, and thus, when struck by daring fingers, giving off a loud discordant jangle out of keeping with the rest.”

And of course, this freedom from any necessity of verbal compromise is simply the reflection of an unprejudiced relationship to experience, of an “ unconscious ease ” . . . “ which is only to be found where the poet has made up his mind about the world they (his women) live in, its end, its nature, and his own craft and technique, so that his mind is free to apply its force fully to its object.”

This happy state has been, in some considerable degree, the lot of the writers of any age remarkable for its literature, the Elizabethan, the Augustan, and the Victorian. In spite of internal dissension, the writers of these periods had a solid stratum to which finally they could refer to give value to their emotional utterances. For the Elizabethans it was the passionate life, for the Augustans the social life, the “ honnête homme ” of polite scepticism replacing the chivalrous knight of the literature of religious idealism. The Victorians, of course, lack the serenity of their predecessors ; the protestations of Carlyle and Browning are symptoms of the insidious ravages of the will to believe which replaces in-bred conviction. Still, they took advantage of the lull before the storm and produced the last examples of the literature which retains its expressive value along the whole scale of group-sensibilities. Since then, the reading-public has split. We have the small body of educated sharp-witted readers from whom a small spark of intelligence sometimes flickers, but being passionate, if at all, only about values and not experience, ultimately uncreative ; and themselves so frequently practitioners as to be unsatisfactory even as audience. Beyond lies the vast reading-public which is led by the nose by the high-class literary-journalist-poet type and its tail tweaked by the paragraphist with pretensions not rising above personal gossip. Mrs. Woolf sketches this gloomy scene with a restraint and delicacy which we cannot emulate. But her essay “ How it strikes a contemporary,” coming as it does at the end of a volume which begins with Chaucer, flings the contrast of then and now into unmitigated light and shade. Mrs. Woolf concludes that as all the signs point to this as an off-season, the best thing the critic can do to fill in the time is “ to scan the horizon ; see the past in relation to the future ; and so prepare the way for masterpieces to come.”

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This is advice which the middle-aged will perhaps welcome ; but we doubt if these studious evangelists are of much use as path-straighteners for the Messiah. If the past is any guide, he will come with none of the signs of grace and perhaps attempt to borrow five pounds from the ladies and gentlemen scanning the horizon. For what, in fact, does all the present fuss about literature amount to ? It is the disease of an age which has no proper outlet for a great deal of its energy and so directs the surplus into forms which retain a certain amount of prestige from the time when they were the ornaments of the life of educated aristocrats. It should be clearly understood that creative literature has nothing whatever to do with the mass of material which in books and periodicals is produced as literary criticism. The public has never been so confused and debased in its tastes as during the fifty years in which the discussion of literary questions has become general. The only useful criticism must be technical, but the stuff the public swallows now is, like the pap the mother-monkey provides for its young, a masticated product easy of digestion ; only the parent monkey does not extract all the nourishment.

If the discussion of literature is of little help towards the production of masterpieces, in itself not an inspiring aim, the admission of boredom from the public might lead to better results. In its present tendencies literature is far too destructive, too anti-social, or at least enquiring, to be appreciated by those whose appetites are sufficiently keen, or gross, to enable them to approve the contemporary spectacle. Modern work appeals necessarily to a restricted audience, of no particular class but with a common sensibility, and there is no object in trying to expand this audience artificially. It is certainly to the advantage of literature, now, to fall below commercial standards of value. If the common reader could really be identified with the author of these essays we should not have been able to make them the excuse for a tirade. Unfortunately the sensitiveness which is common to them is a quality with which we rarely meet in contemporary criticism. Perhaps we may hope it is a property of the inarticulate, who silent and un-named, form the real modern audience. Whether or not Mrs. Woolf's title be an appeal from the self-styled *illuminati* to the anonymous throng, at any rate she may claim the attribute which is the most valuable of those in Johnson's definition of the common reader, one whose sense is "uncorrupted by literary prejudices."

E. R.

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THE DEATH OF CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE. By J. LESLIE HOTSON. Nonesuch Press. 7s. 6d.

By a piece of research in which chance and ingenuity most happily collaborated, Dr. Hotson has discovered for us the true circumstances of Marlowe's death. The traditional story, with its

## COMMENTS AND REVIEWS

sentimental bohemianism, is completely discredited, but the new one, by bringing the affair into closer contact with Marlowe's personal conduct and character, leaves us with a more important and more troublesome riddle.

The absolute value of the documents which Dr. Hotson presents is apparent, because they include the actual text of the pardon which was granted the man who killed Marlowe, and the coroner's inquisition, in which the fatal quarrel is described by eye-witnesses, on oath. The fact is that Marlowe was killed in a room in a Deptford inn early in the evening of May 30, 1593, by a man named Ingram Frizer. The only other men present were Nicholas Skeres and Robert Poley, with whom both Marlowe and Frizer were associated, since all had done secret service work for the Government, and Frizer and Skeres were probably connected with Marlowe as well through the service of Walsingham (see "The Death of Marlowe," by Eugénie de Kalb, *Times Literary Supplement*, May 21, 1925). If, then, there is any question of foul play, the company was well chosen, and there were no other witnesses. If there was any need to throw dust in the eyes of the coroner's jury they were men who would not find it difficult to agree upon a story. Dr. Hotson has unearthed various fragments from contemporary records which show that Marlowe's companions were unambitious cheats and their oath not worth more than a pound or two.

The story told at the inquest is this. The four men met about ten in the morning, passed the time together and dined. After dinner they walked in the inn garden "in quiet sort" and went indoors to supper about six. After supper Marlowe and Frizer had words about the payment of the bill. Marlowe was "lying upon a bed" and Frizer was sitting at a table, with his back to Marlowe, between Skeres and Poley, "in such manner that the same Ingram ffrysar in no wise could take flight." Marlowe, "on a sudden and of his malice," drew Frizer's dagger from where it hung at his back and gave him two wounds on the head with it "of the length of two inches and the depth of a quarter of an inch." Frizer, in fear of his life, and unable to get away, struggled with Marlowe for his dagger, "and so it befell in that affray that the said Ingram, in defence of his life, with the dagger aforesaid of the value of 12d., gave the said Christopher then and there a mortal wound over his right eye of the depth of two inches and of the width of one inch, of which mortal wound the aforesaid Christopher Morley then and there instantly died."

We may suppose Frizer to have seized the wrist of the hand in which Marlowe held the dagger and to have turned the point away from himself. Then, if he were the stronger man, he might certainly have wounded Marlowe in the face, but, if one may judge from one's own brow, it would need a very strong and well directed blow to pierce two inches through the bone *over* the eye, unless,

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indeed, Marlowe were still lying on the bed and the weight of Frizer's body forced the blade down. But in this case the excuse that he was in fear of his life and unable to get away from Marlowe would be hardly good enough. Vaughan's account, written seven years after the affair, conflicts with the coroner's report at several points and does away with this difficulty of the strength of the blow, for he says that Ingram, with his own dagger (but in self-defence), "stabbed this Marlowe into the eye, in such sort, that his braines comminge out at the dagger's point, hee shortlie after dyed." Vaughan, however, was not present, and his virtuous imagination may have added this picturesque detail, since he comments "thus did God, the true executioner of divine justice, work the end of impious Atheists." Still, the coroner should have confirmed the position of the wound *over* the eye. The inquest appears to have been summary. No comment is made on the passive attitude of the other two men, and the jury found that Marlowe was killed in self-defence.

The possibility that Marlowe was murdered should be neither seized upon nor ignored; on the present evidence we cannot tell. But even in those days, which Dr. Hotson describes as Italianate, it is not likely that men like these fought to the death for the price of a couple of meals; there is no suggestion of drunkenness. If there really was a quarrel between Frizer and Marlowe it may have been not over the bill, but over a larger transaction in which he had cheated Marlowe, for Dr. Hotson has caught Frizer in some shady affairs. Speculation is useless, but at this point we must mention another discovery of Dr. Hotson's which may point the direction for future research. It is a certificate of good character from the Privy Council to the University of Cambridge, showing that even before he was 23, Marlowe had acquitted himself well in secret missions, so well that the Government wished his good name to be vindicated against popular rumours by the conferring of his M.A. degree at Commencement of that year 1587. Six years later though—in fact, a fortnight before he was killed—he was summoned to appear before the Privy Council on an unknown charge. Had he, in the interval, become obnoxious to his masters? Many subversive opinions were attributed to him, and even pamphlets, in which, Beard says (1597), he affirmed "our Saviour to be but a conjurer and seducer of the people, and the Holy Bible to be but vaine and idle stories, and all religion but a device of policy."

If the Government was privy to Marlowe's death, it would be interesting to know how much or how little Sir Thomas Walsingham, at whose house he had just been staying, knew about it. The death of Marlowe made no difference, apparently, to a sort of small business relation between himself and Frizer, and it may be noted that Chapman dedicates the continuation of "Hero and Leander" to Audrey, his wife.



## COMMENTS AND REVIEWS

It will be seen that Dr. Hotson's discoveries raise as many questions as they answer, and we can only hope that the same skill and knowledge will clear still more of the same path.

For this academic publication the Nonesuch Press has not declined from its high standard of design and production. Its appearance is very pleasing, and it contains facsimiles of two of the important documents.

E. R.

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LE BAL DU COMTE D'ORGEL. By RAYMOND RADIGUET.  
(Bernard Grasset, Paris, 7fr. 50.)

When Raymond Radiguet died in 1923, he had already written a book of poems, *Les Jours en Feu* (yet to be published), and two novels, *Le Diable au Corps* and *Le Bal du Comte d'Orgel*. Yet though he was only twenty when he died, his last book shows no signs of that usually irritating anomaly, *l'enfant prodige*. As he wrote of Rimbaud: "L'âge n'est rien. C'est l'œuvre et non l'âge auquel il l'écrivit qui m'étonne. . . . On fait toujours mieux. Mais que les timides qui n'osent pas montrer leurs œuvres en attendant de faire mieux ne trouvent pas ici une excuse à leur faiblesse. Car dans un certain sens, plus subtil, on ne fait jamais mieux, on ne fait jamais plus mal." It is in this subtle sense that one perceives the value of Radiguet's work.

*Le Diable au Corps* is the story of a young boy's precocious love for a woman older than he and married, but the vigour and sincerity with which it is told rid it of the mawkishness that was to be expected. It is not a really remarkable book but it shows great promise and, in *Le Bal du Comte d'Orgel*, that promise is in great part fulfilled. How well Radiguet understood what he wished to do may be realised from his note apropos of *Le Bal*: "Roman où c'est la psychologie qui est romanesque." For this is his achievement—to have written a novel dependent for its success, not on its plot, but on the *romance of the mind*. He is not concerned, as are so many of his contemporaries, with the sophisticated exploitation of intricate, unusual psychology, but writes with the candour of an assimilated sophistication, only possible to the great. The ingenuousness which at first strikes one, does not affect "ces profondeurs que notre esprit ne visite pas, où se forment les vrais pressentiments." He is sure of his content: only in his expression of it is he sometimes naïvely uncertain. There is nothing strained about his writing, none of the *préciosité* of, for instance, M. Morand, whose brilliance so often dissembles an emotional and psychological hysteria. Radiguet's tendency to be sententious is essentially a youthful fault. When he writes of the insipid, worldly Paul Robin, "Ne pas vouloir être dupe, c'était sa maladie," he utters an astute criticism, but it should not have been necessary to add, "C'est la maladie du siècle." To do so detracts from the force of his remark,

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and in the same way his generalisation of the characters in the admirable scene on *le train des théâtres*, dulls the vivacity of his portraiture.

For the rest, *Le Bal du Comte d'Orgel* is a slight, but remarkable, novel. The scantiness of *décor* is justified by its effect—calculated by Radiguet—of accentuating the drama of the two personalities, Mahaut and François. It is regrettable that French literature, in its present state of somewhat unhealthy, in-bred sophistication, should have been deprived of such an invigorating influence, but there is no doubt that Radiguet has already made himself felt, and his book should certainly be read by those English people who wish to understand contemporary French mentality.

D. M. G.

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THE SEVEN DAYS OF THE SUN. By W. J. TURNER. (Chatto and Windus. 5s.)

There is always a shade of impertinence in attempting to analyse the problems of expression with which a poet is faced, but it is necessary to do this in order to criticise. In the case of Mr. Turner it would seem that he is doubtful as to the integrity of his poetry, and that he is striving to adapt it to a closer relationship with experience by introducing satire. In this he fails because he lacks the wit necessary for its execution. At best his humour is blunt : at worst it leads him to the clumsy, and rather self-conscious, elaboration of a *jeu de mots*—exclamation marks are scattered thickly through his poem.

After his last book of verse, "Landscape of Cytherea," one had looked for a development of the lyrical qualities which he there showed, but in "The Seven Days of the Sun" his method is entirely different. His rebellion against scientific positivism has led him to satirise science, and to do this he assumes the character of an undergraduate, for whom

"Reality is bewilderment."

But he never gets to grips with his subject. He fidgets about its surface ; as, for instance,

"What is the Evolutionary Theory ?

Does anybody know ?

No doubt women are all descended from cats

Psychologically !

But bodily they appear to be imitations of the Greater Apes  
Like ourselves.

It is by examining the teeth

That we discover who are our relatives.

*Do not look a gift horse in the mouth !*"

The great defect of the poem is that Mr. Turner pretends to an agility of mind, a skittishness, which is foreign to him. The result is that his sword is often turned against himself :

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" O the clever !  
The clever, clever, clever !  
Who are mere waste-paper baskets  
Of one another's epigrams ! "

It is as though, committing the sin against the Holy Ghost, he would exculpate himself by jeering at—for he cannot altogether deny—the Holy Ghost, so that his final apostrophe to the " voice of Light " falls quite flat.

One looks forward to Mr. Turner's return to his own poetry (of which there is here but a pale reflection), for one cannot believe that " The Seven Days of the Sun " owes much to his personal inspiration.

D. M. G.

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ST. MAWR. By D. H. LAWRENCE. Secker. 7s. 6d.

One of these two novelettes—as the publisher with ironic pedantry terms them—has already run through these pages, and need not be closely studied here. The other, and longer, is less known in England. Neither, however, can be reviewed without reference to the rare genius of Mr. Lawrence, as elsewhere expressed in fiction, poetry, or criticism. Not " St. Mawr " itself, nor " The Princess " is an independent work, and Mr. Lawrence never has written an independent work. He proffers commanding beauties, and now and again he seems to have translated his black, subtle philosophy into art, but to many admirers it must seem that the work matters less than the man, that his fiction is not a series of lovely or startling adventures, but the authentic autobiography of a lonely soul engaged upon a rare quest. Mr. Lawrence, by no trickery of technique, suggests to the reader that anything will happen, and something quite tremendous may. He excites, always and everywhere. He satisfies that excitement too rarely. In point of fact, " St. Mawr " is more exciting and less satisfactory than any of his recent work. There are passages where man's kinship with the lower animals is made so plain that we can only and weakly gasp our admiration, but there are passages of pure bosh. On the whole, the bosh predominates. " St. Mawr " is one of Mr. Lawrence's halting places. He halts there, half bewitched by the past, half summoned forward by the future. He piles up rhetoric, but cannot, as yet, disengage the future from the past. It is chaos ; and Mr. Lawrence, while able to ride, is unable to govern, the storm.

To come to particulars. " St. Mawr " is the story of a woman disgusted by the etiolated intelligence of her husband, and fascinated by the full-blooded nobility of her horse. But the horse, carried across the seas, neighs after a long-legged Texan mare, and the woman goes out into the wild, up the Rockies, to seek the solitude upon which she may burn, as on a vestal altar, her spiritual vir-

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ginity. She is annoyed by—symbolically speaking—the Prince of Wales and his replicas in Canadian butter. She is contemptuous of the Zane Grey heroes, those natural Tom Mixes. Somewhere in the wild, where alfalfa for want of water cannot grow, where the rat eats humanity out, she may live. Or may she not be able to live? Mr. Lawrence cannot say. The lurid phantasmagoria of his imagination streams by, but the Thing Behind he has not handled.

“St. Mawr” is not a good story; ill-shaped and stiffly-jointed. “The Princess” is a good story, but better in its incidents than in its theme. Re-reading it, one cannot fail to be impressed by the power of Mr. Lawrence. But . . . to read it is to walk in the track of lightning. Here a tree is cleft, there a vista demoniacally illuminated. Mr. Lawrence’s genius is destructive and appalling, and one knew that before. The creative Mr. Lawrence has not in these novelettes been busily enough occupied.

H. C. H.

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THE TRAP. By DOROTHY RICHARDSON. Duckworth. 7s. 6d.

Probably no one has done more than Miss Richardson to transform modern fiction. She popularised, if she did not invent, the subjective novel, and genius, beside which her own meagre talents insignificantly fade, has been expended upon it. Once, and not very long ago, Miss Richardson’s novels, or rather the instalments of Miss Richardson’s novel, were reckoned as quite important. She was parodied, discussed, esteemed. But now . . . it would be meiosis to say that Miss Richardson has failed to fulfil her earlier promise. The bleak truth is that Miss Richardson perfected a way of saying things without having anything to say. The bleak truth is that Miriam Henderson gets steadily duller and more verbose.

“The Trap” must be very close to Miss Richardson’s nadir. Miriam, flopping like a sickly frog from one marsh pool into another, has landed herself into the company of Miss Holland, who is efficient and gentlewomanly, but an esurient fool. Miss Holland perplexes Miriam. Hypothetically, Miriam should be interested to meet the vicar’s daughter, to taste a new slice of life. But Miss Holland has false teeth of vulcanite, which she slops down into a saucer every night, and Miriam hears it through the curtain. Then Miriam doesn’t mind windows rattling, and Miss Holland does. And then Miriam is, or after all might have been made, more intelligent than Miss Holland. She took Miss Holland out to an Italian restaurant, and Miss Holland was shocked by the presence of prostitutes.

All the time, too, Miriam is hating men. They are so complacent, so . . . fatuous, so altogether unlike nice girls of twenty-nine. It annoys Miriam so much. Complacently fatuous men, fatuously complacent men, always misunderstand. But what do they mis-



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understand? Miriam can hardly tell. It would be so nice if men were pleasant at first sight. Women are. Then women begin to go off. They take out their vulcanite dentures, and put them into saucers; you can hear them through the curtains. Nothing is left, because, perhaps, all these nice doctors and Russians are quite as unpleasant as women heard undressing the other side of the curtain. Everyone is so silly. Everything is so silly. Thus far Miriam.

Miss Richardson, though knowing better, takes us no further. To the associations of her early youth she attaches so much importance that she vomits them on her public. It is so crude, and it is so dull. The other day Miss Richardson protested with some passion against the poor way her books sold. Do they deserve to sell better? Is there anything there but an excellent manner execrably applied?

H. C. H.

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DISCURSIONS ON TRAVEL, ART AND LIFE. By OSBERT SITWELL. (Grant Richards, 21s.).

The usual travel-book is dull, especially if written with literary pretensions. It is filled with facts which appeal to the memories only of the encyclopædic maniacs who express themselves in that communal art medium, the correspondence column; and its description of the foreign scene, though propped by frequent photographs, never reaches the imagination, because the details are arranged according to no æsthetic principle. The latter criterion is one by which every travel-book must be judged which aims at more than the practical serviceability of Baedeker. Mr. Sitwell's *Discursions* easily survive the test; the successive pictures of Southern Italy, Sicily and Bayreuth presented there are continuously readable and vitally evocative; the casualness of their presence together is subordinated to the unity imposed by a very individual pictorial sense. The lustrous decorative art of Tiepolo, which he elucidates in his final chapter, has many points of sympathy with his own imagination, which is at once representational and consciously stylized. A good example of this is the description of Acireale, an architecturally grotesque town in the shadow of Etna, which destroyed it in 1693:

"With the streets and squares thus hastily thrown up, like the scenery of an improvised theatre, the life of the town could continue as before. In the daytime an orator could address the market-place with bold words and gestures from one of the balconies, while the masks below reflected the democratic feelings of surprise, horror, and laughter. At night, however, the masks would be hidden, and the balconies would become floating rafts in the air, from which cool music would drip down into the hot ways below, or barges, moored high among the fresh play of the young winds, from which, for once, revers-

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ing the usual order, the ladies, masked by darkness, would serenade the men waiting below, or, themselves silent, watch the life flowing beneath them and hear the snarling voices and deep braying of the piazzas carried up by eddies of warm, flower-scented air."

The great deal of information imparted is enlivened by intelligence, sarcasm, and (a quality in Mr. Sitwell not usually stressed by his critics) good sense. *Discursions* is a book whose limitations are implied in its title, but it is such a good one of its kind that it deserves to be distinguished from the slovenly and amateurish productions with which it might be associated under the heading of "Travel."

B. H.

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### SELECT DIALOGUES OF LUCIAN. Translated by FRANCIS HICKES. (Guy Chapman. 3s. 6d.)

Peregrinus the Cynic once resolved to prove the sincerity of his beliefs by burning himself to death in public at the Olympic Games. First, however, he made a speech to the crowd, hoping perhaps that they would forcibly prevent him from carrying out his design. But the majority shouted, "keep your promise." On this the old man "grew pale, trembled and was silent." Lucian, who was present, describing the incident afterwards to a friend, remarked, "You can easily understand how much I was diverted by him." Respect for suffering is, to some degree, a modern development, but Lucian's insensibility seems to be not so much a consequence of his age as a personal deficiency of temperament which put large tracts of reality outside his comprehension, and so invalidates his occasional pretensions to universal satire. For that, a coherent view of life is necessary, and a coherent philosophy is outside the scope of a mind whose capacity for experience has never proved itself equal to the task of synthesis. Lucian's method and style, in this seventeenth-century translation, is continuously suggestive of Swift's; but who will dare to say that "Gulliver's Travels" is invalid as an interpretation of life? The profundity and spirit of such art are not in Lucian; his constructive vision goes no further than that of Sextus Empiricus:—"He who is of the opinion that anything is either good or bad by nature is always troubled. . . . But he who is undecided about things good and bad by nature neither seeks nor avoids anything eagerly, and is therefore in a state of tranquility." But the literary equipment of his satire has never been surpassed. To the dramatic power shown in "Timon," the narrative power of "The True History," and the argumentative wit of "Charon," he added a supreme pictorial fancy which enabled him to destroy the gods in the con-

## COMMENTS AND REVIEWS.

vincing setting of their own abodes. The publisher deserves thanks for making accessible to moderate pockets and Greekless readers this classic rendering of some of Lucian's most brilliant work.

B. H.

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THE LITTLE CHRONICLE OF MAGDALENA BACH. Chatto and Windus. 6s. net.

There seems to be a conspiracy on the part of biographers, novelists and painters to idealise great musicians out of existence. It is permissible to represent any other kind of artist as he really was; the musician alone must be represented, physically and spiritually, as an angel descended from Heaven. Why this should be so it is impossible to imagine, since in actual fact he is not merely as fallible as other mortals, but often a person of the most reprehensible moral tendencies. Indeed, "if music be the food of love," what else can we expect? Euterpe, moreover, has long been notorious for being the most thirsty of the Muses.

In view of all this we must confess to having approached this book with many qualms, and forebodings which in the reading happily proved to have been groundless. It certainly presents an idealised picture of Johann Sebastian Bach, but this is largely justified on several grounds. Firstly, it purports to be the journal of a loving and devoted wife, written long after the object of her devotion had been dead. Secondly, we know so little about him that there is not the usual irritating discrepancy between the man as we know he was or must have been, and the portrait with which we are presented. Thirdly, if there ever was an exception to the general rule indicated in the preceding paragraph, it is surely Bach, who, even judging from the little we know about him, must have been as near to being an angel as any man who ever lived; an angel, though, not of the soft, sentimental variety of our childish imaginings, but a veritable Angel of the Lord on whom it is not possible to look without fear and trembling. And it is because the anonymous writer of this little book has felt this—in his music rather than in the facts of his life as we know them—that we may say that it is a good book. The best things in it are probably those passages in which awe and fear are stronger even than the great love of Anna Magdalena for her husband.

"I have had awful moments when I looked at him, seated in his armchair, with the children and myself all round engaged on our various pursuits, and yet I felt that he was all alone—above us, beyond us, and lonely. Sometimes the feeling was so strong and painful that I would upset my sewing or my music copying and run to him, and, kneeling by his side, put my arm round him." . . . "I never quite got used to him in all the years of our marriage: I would have queer stabs of astonishment at the something so big

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in him which I never quite understood or could explain, which the people of Leipzig, which even his own sons and daughters, in spite of their admiring respect, never seemed to perceive. But to me it was always in the background of my mind, it was like a faint fear, and even our love never entirely cast it out. He was always bigger than I could reach to.”—

That is very much what we all feel about Bach. Our awe and fear are sometimes greater even than our love for him. There are moments when we feel he is almost as inhuman as one of Mr. Shaw's Ancients in the last part of “Back to Methuselah.”

The writer shows himself, or herself, to be a fine musician, with a thorough knowledge and understanding of the music of the master. The book is singularly free from the irritating inaccuracies, due to ignorance, which most authors commit when writing on musical subjects, and, finally, it is well written without detracting from the artlessness of character with which the imaginary writer is invested.

CECIL GRAY.

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### COMMENT.

*Der Neue Merkur* for May contains a very interesting and exquisitely written study by Wilhelm Hausenstein of the life of Rembrandt's son, Titus, who served as a model for so many of the paintings. This study is an excerpt from Herr Hausenstein's book on Rembrandt, which will shortly appear in Germany. The author treats with remarkable imaginative insight the life of the queer Rembrandt household, and its influence on Titus, whose fate was to be always a son, “nothing but a son.” It is an admirable psychological study. In the same issue there is a very up-to-date but rather unilluminating survey of the English stage by Rudolf Nutt. The monthly review of European events, in politics and literature, is as usual very able.

The most noteworthy items in *Die Neue Rundschau* for the same month are a translation of an essay on Hamlet by the Danish writer, Johannes V. Jensen, which has already, we believe, appeared in English, a translation of one of Mr. Bernard Shaw's many pronouncements on civilisation, a vivid account by Alfred Döblin of a journey into Poland, and a very short, but illuminating and characteristic, note on Novalis by that admirable writer, Hermann Hesse. The short stories are by Leonhard Frank and Benvenuto Hauptmann. In both reviews the speculative and critical articles are, on the whole, better than the stories, but both maintain a high standard.

E. M.



## COMMENTS AND REVIEWS

POETIC UNREASON. ROBERT GRAVES. Cecil Palmer. 6s.

The objections to the introduction of psychoanalytic theory into the criticism of poetry are obvious, and most of them are accurately illustrated in Mr. Graves' book. Psychoanalysis, in its present state, is as much a matter of taste as poetry, and is more popular, since it leaves the individual free to exercise his personal discrimination unembarrassed by commonly accepted standards. Mr. Graves has a concrete, lively and ingenuous intelligence, and in a previous book he explained his adherence to Dr. W. H. Rivers' Church of England compromise with the conflicting Continental dogmas of the unconscious. In place of the Freudian wish-fulfilment theory Dr. Rivers substituted an unconscious conflict as the essential significance of dreams; he denied the uniformly sexual contents of the unconscious; and emphasised the comparatively conscious character of dreams occurring in light sleep, as opposed to the archaic dreaming of heavy slumber. These are the principles on which Mr. Graves conducts his examination of poetical theory and practice.

One or two quotations will make his position clear. "For the poet, the writing of poetry accomplishes a certain end, irrespective of whether the poem ever finds another reader but himself; it enables him to be rid of the conflicts between his sub-personalities. And for the reader, the reading of poetry performs a similar service; it acts for him as a physician of his mental disorders." "Every age has hitherto thought it possible to find a touchstone by which to judge poetry absolutely, and further, every age has thought it has found such a table of absolute values which it was only a matter of time before every one would accept." Whereas, "all that I am insisting on is that no poetry has hitherto appeared, and no poetry can hope to appear, to which an absolute permanent value may legitimately be accorded." The definition of poetry is the statement or solution of a conflict more or less unconscious, and since one man's conflict differs from another's, the conflicts of one age from those of another, the only criterion we are left with is pragmatic: "Does it work in this particular case?" Certain poets, such as Shakespeare, resume a greater number of contemporary conflicts than do others, and are consequently more widely read. Since we have an inclination towards absolute valuations, they are called geniuses by an age that finds such conflicts relevant; by an age that does not they are forgotten, as was Shakespeare in the century 1650-1750, and will be again.

Mr. Graves' general theory of relativity is not new, but it contains some truth and is expressed with spirit. It is in his particular theory that he gives himself away. Excited, for example, on reading Edward Lear's Nonsense Songs, by the just supposition that "the adoption of this pseudo-infantility of expression must surely denote suffering in an extreme form," he continues: "Francis Thompson's Sister Songs and Lear's Nonsense Rhymes are apparently the same sort of escape from the same sort of conflict; strange that Lear is treated less seriously. And who will say that the foolery in Edward Lear is less worthy of our tragic imagination than the terrible foolery at the crisis of King Lear?" Lear's poems have considerable force, of a kind that psycho-analysis makes more readily explicable; but Mr. Graves does not use these terms inconsiderately. In the course of the book he analyses a number of poems of varying merit; and having uncovered some or other of the underlying conflicts, he adduces the personal suffering of the poet as evidence of the poetical value of his work. The psychological implications of this attitude run through the book and prejudice Mr. Graves' treatment of every subject of importance. Besides the conflict theory, Mr. Graves makes use of Dr. Rivers' distinction between the dreams of light and heavy sleep, as a definition of classical and romantic poetry. "Classical poems are written in a mood in which the poet is preoccupied, perhaps, but aware of the conventional waking view of reality; when the emotional (romantic) kind of poem appears, it rises either from actual deep sleep or from a 'brown study' trance, disturbance in which will affect the poet with the same shock

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as if he had been actually asleep." And the greater part of " Poetic Unreason " is a defence of the illogical, symbolic and unaware processes of thought that distinguish what Mr. Graves calls our " lower level " dreams and romantic poetry. The subject has inspired him to some acute and entertaining criticism ; but since justification, not enquiry, is his concern, he suppresses at will any portions even of Dr. Rivers' mild and home-brewed psychology that cause him uneasiness. The result is worthless as a contribution to serious criticism, but has considerable value as the psychological confession of an interesting poet. Up to a point Mr. Graves' honesty is exceptional and his evasions have consequently genuine interest. But the correlation of criticism with modern psychology is an unavoidable development, however dangerous ; and it is unfortunate that Mr. Graves, while he avoids none of the dangers, should have found nothing of importance to say on it.

J. F. HOLMS.



## Among New Books

DAY OF ATONEMENT. By LOUIS GOLDING. Chatto & Windus.  
7s. 6d.

Of all the fatalities which have pursued the Jewish race the most curious, though not the least explicable, is that, while it produces many great artists, great art cannot be made out of it. It is, for instance, impossible to make a tragic figure out of an orthodox Jew. Causation is too rigid and simplified in Jewry to allow any strict Hebrew soul to stand nakedly at the mercy of circumstances in even its most desperate moment. Again, to make a tragic figure from a proselyte, by virtue of his proselytism, is hardly easier, for the entirely opposite reason that religious conversion is the most hysterical of human acts. Mr. Golding writes of an apostate Jew who commits the ultimate sacrilege of preaching Christ in the synagogue and is murdered by his loving, but devout and conservative wife—a *dénouement* which, though magnificently prepared, quite fails to excite pity. Mr. Golding must be tired of being reminded of his promise, but that is still the best of this novel. Its sceneries and incidental philosophies are excellently composed, and its prose is always adequate and sometimes beautiful.

MOUNTEBANKS: A PLAY IN THREE ACTS. By FRANK BIRCH.  
Chatto & Windus. 5s.

This play is vigorously written, but the central emotions are over-expressed. The situations, which centre round the fatal passion of a monk for a girl in a travelling show, and have for background the clashes between the monastic idea and the rich medieval lay life, are familiar and have lent themselves advantageously to novelistic treatment. Mr. Birch modernises his characters after the manner of "Saint Joan," and they have a clear-cut if unmemorable life in action. But when the action is delayed by dramatisation of general ideas, the dialogue touches fustian.

LONDON LIFE IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY. By M. DOROTHY GEORGE. (Kegan Paul, 21s.)

The material condition of the poor in the eighteenth century was notoriously low, and historians describe it according to one or other of two unreconciled economic theories. Until recently the Industrial, like the French Revolution, was accepted as an event so radical and influential that lesser causes of cleavage from the *status quo* were either neglected outright or perverted from their proper semblance into ramifications of the principal movement. Mrs. George's conclusions from the unrivalled mass of evidence she has collected are, to some degree, a timely and convincing modification of that view, but she refrains from making it her main thesis, and wisely, for London was less affected than any of the great towns in the immediate consequences of the industrial upheaval. She shows clearly, however, that much of the social misery usually ascribed to that event was really due to the collapse of trade after the Napoleonic wars, though in that relation, too, the capital "to a great extent escaped both the torrent of pauperisation which deluged the greater part of agricultural England and the catastrophic fall in wages which occurred in many places." The history which will disentangle the evidence as a whole and establish the causes in their right proportions remains to be written. Meanwhile Mrs. George has given us a detailed and admirably presented picture of the vast slum which produced and carried the culture by whose refinement we are nowadays abashed. The scene she describes is too multifarious to be touched on in a short notice, and in its general lineaments is well known. One of the most interesting

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chapters is that on vital statistics, in which she discusses at length that extraordinary riot of gin-drinking between 1720 and 1750, whose ravages stripped off London's civic decoration for Hogarth's vision.

THE TORTOISESHELL CAT. By NAOMI ROYDE-SMITH. Constable. 7s. 6d.

If for nothing else, and in any case for this especially, Miss Royde-Smith deserves congratulation; she has caught adolescence in its decline, without brushing the bloom from its wings. Gillian is neither, on the one hand, nymphomania masked as innocence, nor, on the other hand, the pole-star by guidance of which all masculine barks must steer. She is just a nice girl, very pretty . . . and all that, but not wondrous, and her remarkable innocence, after amusing the reader, begins to bother *her*. She very nearly sails into an unholy mess. And she herself is not to be congratulated on the way she got away from it. With the same competence the author handles secondary figures.

Very much more might have been done with the theme, good as the treatment is, and one still desiderates from Miss Royde-Smith something sharper. This is all great fun. Miss Royde-Smith might be quite as funny and ten times more important. She is, in short, too good to make us content with her smoothly clever but slightly unenterprising commentary upon life.

MANIFESTE DU SURREALISME. POISSON SOLUBLE. By ANDRÉ BRETON. Kra. 7 frs. 50 c.

M. Breton's definition of the process or faith of which he is the prophet is as follows:—

SURREALISME, n.m. Automatisme psychique pur par lequel ou se propose d'exprimer, soit verbalement, soit par écrit, soit de toute autre manière, le fonctionnement réel de la pensée. Dictée de la pensée, en l'absence de tout contrôle exercé par la raison, en dehors de toute pré-occupation esthétique ou morale.

Young's "Night Thoughts," says M. Breton, are *surréaliste* from beginning to end; Shakespeare only "dans ses meilleurs jours." His arguments are based on the theory of the unconscious and the association of images which holds the field at present; he is dogmatic where he should be tentative. His effort is in the direction of what M. Benda has described as the hatred of general ideas, the feminisation of art, the sole enjoyment of the concrete and the particular; the emotionalisation of literature. It ignores altogether the constructive effort in poetry, the organisation of the *whole* into something significant. It is the lack of this organisation which makes so tedious the reading of M. Breton's prose poems *Poisson Soluble*. The concatenation of imagery is sometimes stimulating, but it leads nowhere. The poem and the day-dream are not identical, though they make use of the same mental processes. Perhaps M. Breton will agree when he has carried his analysis a little deeper. At least, he ought not to let his evident gifts rot in the slough of his present enthusiasm.

TRISTAN CORBIÈRE. By RENÉ MARTINEAU. Le Divan. 12 frs.

Corbière is a remarkable poet, who, although he died in 1875, is still not so well known as many lesser writers. M. Martineau's biography, which was first published some twenty years ago, is in this edition fuller and more precise, thanks to documents and information supplied by relatives of the poet.